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Continuity and Change in Early Islamic in Cyrenaica (7th to 10th Centuries)

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Continuity and Change in Early Islamic in Cyrenaica (7th to 10th Centuries)

By

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To my daughter
Ghadi Dreza

In memory of my father
Mohamed Bubtana

To my Mother & Family

To my close friend
Osama

Copyright / Declaration

Declaration

No material in this thesis has been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other university.

Abstract

As a Libyan Archaeologist from the University of Benghazi, I have examined anew in this thesis the archaeological record for the 7th to the 10th centuries in Cyrenaica, as it concerns six principal sites: Ajdabiyah, Medina Sultan, Barqa, Taucheira, Tolmeitha, and Ras el-Hilal.

Fresh fieldwork has been largely impossible for me as the originating point for my research because of the military situation in Libya during these past few years. However, the originality of this thesis lies in its reassessment of the existing and published archaeological record, and a re-reading of the archaeology in the light of a new consideration of the medieval sources in their original Arabic texts. I have also retranscribed and reread a good number of original inscriptions.

The re-interpretation of the existing and published archaeological record has brought to light the degree to which the Islamic conquest of Cyrenaica was not, at a local level, the sudden and simple event that the idea of military victory conjures up. Rather it was the beginning of a process that in the centuries following the Arab invasion, evolved in a slow and complex way in the six sites here considered. The argument of this thesis is that at a local level, well away from the political simplicities of important military and historical events, it is continuity rather than disruption which comes to seem important. Human life is defined by its *localness*.

The archaeological record can be read for these sites, then, in a way which makes them a valuable counterpointing of the historical record of these early Arab centuries. There has been occasion in the thesis to comment more than once on the fact that archaeology should not be too easily considered the handmaid of history, that its view of events and of human life lived is valuably different in scale and angle from the shaping abstractions of historical writing.

Durham, August 2019

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Chapter 1 : General introduction

1.   The aim of this chapter

The transition from the Late Antique, Byzantine and Early Islamic Period has been very rarely addressed. The present work focuses on the period immediately before and then after the Arab settling, after the conquest, from the 7th to the 10th centuries CE[1]. This period of about four hundred years has been chosen because it is the period during which Islamic military and administrative rule established itself in Cyrenaica; as well as the period during which 'arabisation' seems gradually to have developed into 'Islamisation' in the region.

Geographically the research considers Cyrenaica, i.e. the territory stretching between modern Tunisia in the west and Egypt in the east, which played an essential 'bridging' role in the spread of the Arab conquest from Egypt to the rest of North Africa. The position of Cyrenaica makes this research essential to fully understand the Arab expansion from Egypt into the rest of North Africa, and subsequently into southern Europe.

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[1] Precise dates in this thesis will always be given in both Islamic and standard modern conventions; dates by century will always simply use the CE notation

1.1 The background

The archaeology of North Africa after the Arab conquest has long been neglected. The major focus has been on the Roman remains and on the Byzantine forts and churches; and the stratigraphic sequences relating to later phases of occupation, after the 7th century and the Arab conquest, have been subject to major destruction with little or no recording, frequently destroyed in the actual process of archaeological examination of pre-Islamic remains (Hardy-Guilbert 2010, p97).

In the last twenty years more attention has been paid to early Islamic phases, but the archaeology focusing on this period is still very limited, and provides only a limited range of information. The data are too patchy to provide an overall picture and overall it is almost impossible to provide a clear picture. More work will be required, to include excavations and surveys in the next twenty years, before it will be possible to fully understand the impact of the Arab conquest in the region. Secondly a lot more work will be required in the study of early Islamic pottery to be able to define chronologies within the pottery studies and fully reconstruct the transformations which followed the Arab conquest of this region, to include also the process of Islamisation. Pottery in North Africa has mainly been studied up to the 7th century, which is when the Roman production ends.   Another point which is still very much still open to investigation, is to do with the size of the invading forces and consequently the impact that the Arab coming to Cyrenaica really had. These are all aspects which at the moment is not possible to address. By reconsidering analytically and comprehensively the archaeological evidence and the sources, the present work aims to start defining the evidence and identifying trends, ultimately to define directions for future research.

Archaeological research in Cyrenaica has mostly been carried out during the colonial period, between the end of the 19th and the early 20th centuries and later during the

period of the British Protectorate in the 1950s. The focus has been primarily on the Roman and Byzantine archaeological evidence, primarily in search of mosaics and statues, with little attention spared for the later period of occupation.

However, understanding the role and the value of Cyrenaica in this period of transition is essential in shedding new light also on the commercial and economic evolution of this area. The region had been the major economic driving force in the Roman period. It controlled economically the whole Mediterranean. Its role as a bridge between the east and the west was essential in supporting the Roman conquest first, and the Byzantine and Arab later. It has been Cyrenaica's rich land, and its geographical position which have made this territory always a territory to conquer. We know that the region was one of the economic hubs of the Roman Empire,[2] and it maintained such a role up to at least the end of the 7th century (Leone 2007).

It is possible to suggest that the Arab conquest was somehow different, not aiming to conquer new land for cultivation and settlement, but rather, initially, with the intention to acquire a territory which would open the roads to the conquest of the rest of North Africa and part of southern Europe. It has been argued that Cyrenaica in the early Arab centuries was not subject, for instance, to the same intense "Arabization of Roman Byzantine Cordova" which originated as part of the 'internal' "Umayyad-Abbasid struggle" (Tamari 1996, p.29); nor the anti-pagan Arabization of Baghdad in the 8th century by "the second Abbasid Khalifa al-Mansur (754-775) who personally planned both conceptually and structurally his capital in its appellation as a cosmo-paradisic city of Allah and His fortress" (Tamari 1996, p30). In the great Muslim cities,

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[2] for the trade of Cyrenaica in antiquity, see Fulford 1989.

at a slightly later date, we may indeed encounter "an immense architecturally urban reality of worship" (Tamari 1996, px), but not in Cyrenaica during our period.

There is also a further, very important matter to take into consideration. In the early centuries of Islam, the "orthodox conviction [was] that the proper Muslim city was one of faith not buildings" (Alsayyad 1996/2, p101). Alsayyad argues convincingly that "the early Muslim Arabs, and especially the early orthodox caliphs, were not the least bit concerned with the architecture of their buildings or the image of their cities" and that this indifference related to the significance of images but also "went beyond the arts to encompass architecture and urban form (Alsayyad 1996/2, pp98-99)". There was anxiety, too, among early Muslim Arab leaders that the soldiers of their armies might get too used to the comforts of the cities they overcame, and the attempt was made, for instance, by Caliph Umar Ibn Al-Khattab, in the 7th century, to persuade his soldiers to go on living in tents (Alsayyad 1996/2, p99, quoting Umar).

Alsayyad suggests that the turning point in the Muslim attitude towards elaborate, permanent urban building came in Damascus in the reign of the "devout and orthodox" eighth Ummayad Caliph, Umar II (107AH/729CE-110AH/732CE), who ruled in a city already lavishly endowed with elegant Muslim buildings, and who had grown up in the Umayyad palaces there and was "fully aware of the immense expense involved in their construction and in the construction of mosques such as that in Damascus" (Alsayyad 1996/2, p101), and who wished to return to a simpler way of things. However, a Byzantine delegation passing through Damascus at the time, according to the chronicle story, after visiting the mosque, thought it was evidence of the permanence and grandeur of Muslim power. Hearing this, Umar II abandoned plans to simplify the appearance of the mosque, since he became convinced that grand building could be

used as a way of combatting the enemies of Islam: "it was now legitimate to build as a means of strengthening the Islamic state" (Alsayyad 1996/2, p102).

In this perspective, it is essential to understand the effective role of the Arab conquest in shaping Cyrenaica (Alsayyad 1996/2, p.99; see also especially Sauvaget 1934, and Marcais, W 1928; Marcais 1940; Marcais 1945; Grunebaum 1955; LeTourneau 1957; LeTourneau 1961; Jairazbhoy 1965; Lapidus 1967; Ismail 1969; Hourani 1970; Monier 1971; Ardlan 1973; Serjeant 1980; Saggaf 1987).

Whether its role in the trade system also changed, is vital to understand also, but, as indicated above, it is limited by our understanding of the pottery production after the 7th century. Trade in the Mediterranean is extremely difficult to reconstruct following the Arab conquest. Trade from North Africa went in two directions: north to the Mediterranean Sea and south to South Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. The continuity and change in trade brought about by the Arab conquest is still very much unknown at least until the 9th century, when the re-emergence of ancient sources provides new data for interpretation. Traded goods become more varied, less pottery and more slaves; and fabrics and gold become a focus for trade and export. Overall the picture is still very vague; and there is urgent need for the development of new studies focusing specifically on the period from the 7th to the 9th /10th centuries, in order to provide vital pieces to fit into the jigsaw of our understanding of the region.

Equally the transformation of the society and its religious practices[3], is still very unclear. Cyrenaica had an important role in North African Christianity, the famous Bishop Synesius lived in Ptolemais in the 5th century [4]. Synesius' function in Ptolemais (Tolmeitha) had been the organising of resistance to the raiding parties of Libyan

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[3] for a general discussion of the Christian monuments of Cyrenaica and the Christianisation of the region, see Ward-Perkins and Goodchild 2003; see also Speel 1960; Decret 1996; and Dossey 2010

[4] on Synesius and on the use of Christian officials for ordinary official purposes, see for instance: Lacombrade 1951; Bregman 1982; Barnes 1986; Liebeschuetz 1986; Liebeschuetz 1990; Roques 1989; Schmitt 2001; Dimitrov 2008; Heredero 2014

nomads and the bishops were the major figures to control at the same time also political power.

It has been suggested, in fact, that from a political point of view the organisation of the region did not change after the Arab conquest.[5] One has to bear in mind, too, that the rather easy victory of the Muslim invaders in Cyrenaica in its turn might have contributed to a rapid 'secularising' of Islam. By 'secularising' one would not mean that the believers abandoned their faith, far from it, but that they gave it a 'this-worldly' way of life as they rapidly settled in to their new territorial possessions, with the seductively easy acquiescence of a native population rather used to the way things came and went. The consideration, in the chapters which follow, of the ways in which 'arabisation' shaded into 'islamisation' will have as its background this theorising introductory suggestion.

I shall be looking later in the thesis at the presence of mosques, the building of mosques; and sometimes at the absence of mosques where one would have expected them. I shall have it in my mind that one should neither be surprised that in this city the mosque is the most important building in the place; nor that in that other city there appears to have been no building of a mosque at all, but rather the slightly sketchy use instead of a former Christian church.

1.2 Research questions

The research proposed here develops within a very complex panorama, with the aim of shedding new light on the impact on Cyrenaica, the north-east of Libya, of the Islamic conquest. This conquest was crucial to the Islamic expansion to the rest of North Africa, which played a very important role in the whole region, Cyrenaica being

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[5] see Diait 1967, pp77-122; Diait 1973, pp602-621

located between the east (Egypt) and the west (Tripolitania and Tunisia) of the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Almost nothing is known of the post-Byzantine period of occupation of this region. Studies devoted to this period in Libya have focussed on Tripolitania (Sjöström 1993), while the eastern part of the country has never been studied in detail. The present research aims to fill this lacuna by looking at continuity and change in Cyrenaica immediately before and after the Arab conquest. The chronological limits chosen for the research, from the 7th to the 10th centuries, find their justification in the historical development of the distinctively Islamic state, which only becomes clearly visible, both archaeologically and textually, after about the 10th century, at the end of our transitional period. Most of the Roman cities in North Africa continued to be inhabited in their traditional way until the 9th and the 10th centuries, and it is only after this moment that some new social and territorial organization seems to have taken hold (for a synthesis and more bibliography, see Leone 2007, and more recently Fenwick 2013). The present study therefore aims to answer the following research questions about the complex, difficult to define period between the first impact (or lack of it) of the Arab presence in the territory with the conclusive victory of the Arab armies, and the final 'arabising'/'islamising' of Cyrenaica.

In this panorama the present research aims to answer the following questions:

<u>1. in what ways and at what pace did Islam spread after the conquest?</u>

The other questions this thesis asks are really subsidiary versions of this first question. It will be as important in what follows in the main body of the thesis to give weight to a sense that the Arab invaders were absorbed by the people they conquered, as to bring to light evidence of the reverse movement. Moreover, it is important to evaluate through this research evidence of the impact that the Islamic conquest had effectively on the movement of people. It will be necessary to understand if people moved with

the army, or soldiers were recruited as the conquering army moved, and, therefore, were primarily local. This research will investigate if for some considerable time their number in Cyrenaica was very limited, that their impact in that respect was not substantial, and all the developments, which followed the Arab conquest, apart from the islamisation, were the effect of a long and slow process that started between the end of the 6th and into the 7th centuries. There is clear medieval evidence for the small number of invaders in Cyrenaica; and we may suppose that, in the main, those who came were either soldiers or were the 'support population' of the armies. In the 9th century, for instance, Al-Yaqoubi mentions Berber populations frequently (see 6.2); in the 10th century Ibn Hawqal says that the city of Surt [the name used in this thesis is always Medina Sultan] was inhabited mostly by Berber tribes (see 6.2); in the 11th century, Al-Bakri describes most of the population of Ajdabiyah as Coptic, and says there were also a lot of Copts still in Surt ; in the 12th century, Al-Idrisi says Tocra [the name used in this thesis is Taucheira] is inhabited simply by Berbers (Fehérvári 2002, p.20).

It seems very important not to treat these centuries too simply as a 'time of transition', but also to consider that they are a time of continuity. There is even no such thing perhaps, in human history, as a 'time of transition'. All times are the times they are for the people who live in them; and no human being can have any but the vaguest idea of any future deriving from the life he lives. What may come to seem most important of all in the picture presented in the following pages might be their ordinariness. Invasion and victory are small things, soon over; the weight of every day will make nonsense, perhaps quite soon, of any victory in war. This thesis begins in warfare and ends, a long ending, in peace; it is peace it is concerned with.

2. Is it possible to define Arab settlements in these early centuries? What characteristics and specific elements is it possible to single out?

The shape of what has been said in expanding above on the first question suggests the kind of caution with which one must approach the second. It will be noticed, in the chapters which follow, that there are two classes of archaeological remains dating from the centuries under review. There are those which can be distinguished with confidence as Islamic, and in that degree distinctly non-classical, and there are those which are what they always were, only now more obviously evident than before because the Byzantine influence has gone. The crucial and overriding evidence is quite plain to see: that the Arab invaders do not seem to have had a clear impact on the built environment. The picture presented in this thesis starts from that point, to move onwards to the attempt at confirming or challenging it.

3. How far were settlements changed by the Arab presence? And how did the settlement organization change from the moment of conquest until the 9th /10th centuries?

This third question, asking as it does about 'settlements' and not about 'Arab settlements', arises out of a fairly decisive answer to the previous question. It is possible that the outcome of the research will indicate a substantial continuity in the occupation of the spaces, at least for the period after the Arab conquest.

The third question will also ask about the exercise of authority. One would think, for instance, that *authority* might be exercised from a qasr or a particularly defended part of a town; but it is also possible that distinctive parts of a town acted rather as social collecting points than as organisational or command centres.

4. How did the economy change? What trade routes continued to be in use and which ones were abandoned?

Changes in the economy of the region or in trade routes will emerge in this thesis as measurements of the speed of change, and as deriving generally from a complex of social and geographical reasons rather than from military or political impulses. The impact of these changes will be carefully considered. Does a harbour silt up because it is no longer used for large vessels; or can large vessels no longer use it because it has silted up? How can we follow up the trading evidence after the end of the circulation of the Roman pottery evidence? What are the other goods traded, what do medieval Arabic sources tell us? What is the relationship between textual and archaeological evidence?

5. Did the Arab conquest have a disruptive impact on the life of the inhabitants of the region?

It would be absurd to suppose that some immediate effects of defeat and victory in war were not disruptive; but the time span of this thesis itself privileges continuity over disruption, so that if the answer by the end of the thesis is 'no', this should not be seen as somehow not an important enough answer.

6. How did the Arab conquest impact on the Christian presence?

The understanding of the end of Christianity in North Africa, and the effective role of islamisation in this process, is still very unclear. It may seem that the evidence there is, from other places and in the earliest times, concerning the new Islamic faith suggest that 'impact' is exactly the word one would want in order to describe its arrival in the world. But such evidence from other places will not well fit with the data now collected and reinterpreted in this thesis for the centuries under review in Cyrenaica. Perhaps we shall understand the evidence presented here as instead pointing to Islam very gradually replacing Christianity, without difficulty, in a *blurring of distinctions*. That Jews were living in Cyrenaica in the midst of a prevailing *Christian* presence before

the Arab invasion is clear; and there is clear evidence, for instance in the reports of medieval Arab travellers, that the Arab invasion certainly did not eliminate the Jews in these first centuries. We shall perhaps move towards a picturing of the Christian presence as learning from the Jewish example. And, of course, there must have been some religious people, perhaps many, perhaps even a majority, who would not have meant what a theologian or a historian would wish to be meant by describing themselves as Islamic or Christian or Jewish.

1.3 Methodology, objectives, and impact

The following methodology will be pursued with the intention of answering the questions in 1.2.

Q 1-2. Change in Society and settlements

Data for individual sites will be collected and analysed. Chronologically the information acquired will extend from the 7th to the 9th /10th centuries. The data will be collected for the following sites: Ajdabiyah, Medina Sultan, Barqa, Taucheira, Tolmeitha, Ras el-Hilal. These sites have been chosen as the most important excavated settlements for the period under consideration in this work, where the amount of data will allow the identification of trends and changes occurring in the first centuries of the Arab domination. In the case of some of these sites, much still needs to be done, although preliminary work has been published, as for instance on Islamic Tolmeitha (Kennet 1991). Some of the excavations already undertaken are unfortunately still unpublished, as for instance at Barqa.[6] Each of these settlements will be considered in turn, with specific discussion of the archaeological data, the finds and the textual evidence.

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[6] Barqa has been subject to some excavations, see for Abdussaid 1971; Dore 1990; Dore 1991; Dore 1992; Dore 1993; Dore 1994

The present situation in Libya does not allow any kind of extensive planned and articulated fieldwork; and in particular, for instance, the military situation in the area of Derna was so dangerous at the time of writing this thesis that I was forbidden any access at all to it; and without access of any kind, the chapter I had in mind on Derna has had to be omitted. My research in general will be based primarily on data collected from published materials and archives available in the Department of Antiquities of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. The data collection will focus specifically on evidence of later occupation of the sites. The sites fall into two categories: those which had a long-term occupation which dates back to the Greek period (e.g. Taucheira), and others which are later foundations (e.g. Medina Sultan). Excavation data on monuments, urban organization, and settlement form will be considered. The analysis of the ceramics will be based on published materials, but also deposits and monuments in different sites will be visited (where possible) to verify the presence of unpublished materials and inscriptions. Old photographs and archives and notes taken during excavations and preserved at the Department of Antiquities of Tripoli and Benghazi will be accessed. Data on individual sites will be integrated with medieval Arabic and other sources. The issue of the fortifications, which characterise North Africa from the Byzantine period, will also be considered.

Q 3-4. Trade and Economy.

Pottery (where published) and material culture will be another essential aspect taken into consideration in this research. Although the published data are very patchy and it has been impossible to see the materials, presenting the recorded evidence has been seen as important. An overall work looking at all the pottery evidence is still missing, and this represents the first step to deal with this limitation. In fact, very little is known about the circulation of Late Byzantine/Early Islamic amphorae and this research will

address the issue. Particular attention will be paid to the globular amphorae, for which centres of production have been identified at Lepcis Magna (Cirelli 2004, pp377-393) and whose production becomes also very common in the East (Vroom 2003). Trade routes will be analysed in connection with the itineraries often mentioned in ancient sources.

This research is expected to have an important impact for a number of reasons. Firstly, no synthetic work on the Islamic occupation of Cyrenaica has ever been carried out. This will be the first attempt at collecting all together the currently available data and identifying directions for future research. Secondly, the Libyan government has never had a complete catalogue of all the archaeological sites and monuments in the landscape, and this research will contribute to filling this gap by providing new and important information. Finally, academically this research will contribute enormously to the enhancing of our understanding of the 7th to the 10th centuries, which are currently in our knowledge very obscure.

1.4 Geography of Cyrenaica

Before going on to analyse in detail the archaeological evidence, it is necessary to provide an overall picture of the region under consideration. Cyrenaica's geographical position has played an important role in the history of North Africa and its various transformations through the centuries. Sections on both geography and history will be found in this introductory chapter, but also relating to each of the separate chapters to follow on individual sites, so that the thread of comment on the significance of the geography and the history of Cyrenaica will follow the contours suggested by the particular cities considered in detail, their relation to the overall geography and history of the region, as that becomes relevant. A full account, then, of the geographical and

historical background to the position on the archaeology of the sites which is adopted in this thesis will require a reading of the geography and history sections chapter by chapter.

1.4.1 Landscape

Cyrenaica is located on the northern coast of Africa. It is on a high plateau of limestone known as Green Mountain and stands out northward into the Mediterranean, enclosed by the Gulf of Sidra on the west (Greater Sirtes) and Marmarica to the east (Buru 1960, pp.10-11) (See Fig. 1).

Geographically, the northern part of Cyrenaica can be divided into two regions: The Jebel (the mountain area to the north) and the Sahel (the coastal plain to the east). The Jebel is about 50km away from the coast and reaches in parts a height of 800m. The mountains slope down gently to the desert area, while they are steep to the north and the west. The Sahel is a narrow, irregular coastal plain, forming a strip of land which varies from one to three miles wide, stretching from Benghazi to the east of Derna, a total distance of about 200 miles (Buru 1960, pp.10-11). At intervals, deep and wide wadis cut across the strip of coastal plain into the mountain area. These wadis are dry most of the year, but for short periods after the winter rains are filled with torrential waters (Ward-Perkins and Goodchild 2003, p.1).

The accompanying map shows the main outlines of the physical geography of the region, with the sites chiefly considered in this thesis marked in. The geographical detail of each site is explained in detail in each of the individual chapters, where there is also a discussion of the particular significance of the positioning of each site.
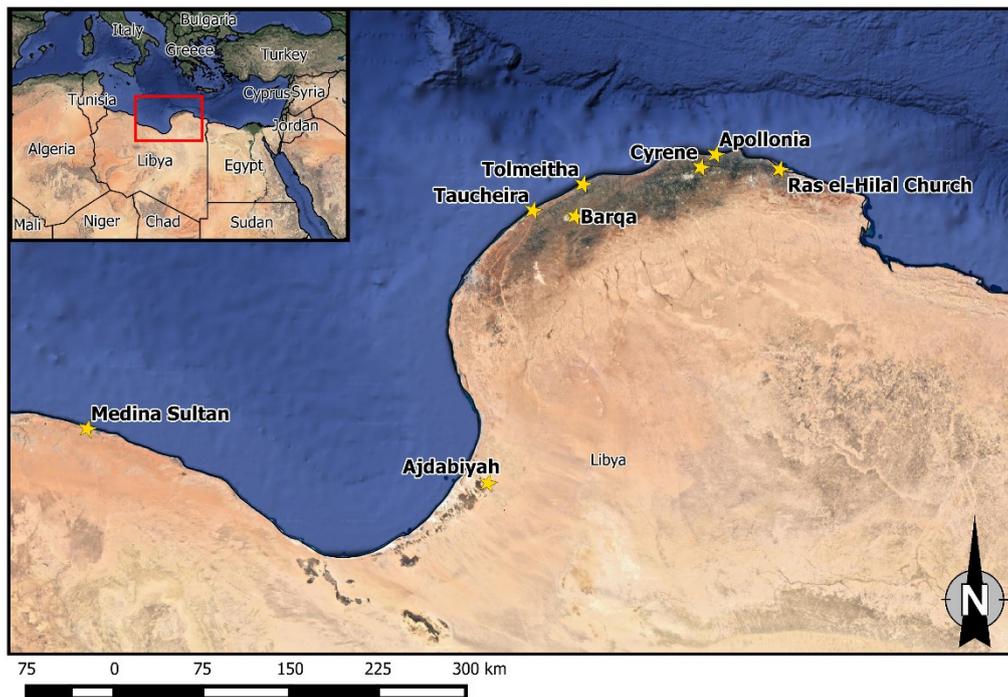
Fig. 1 Close-up map of Cyrenaica showing study sites (by Author elaborated from Google Earth)

1.4.2 Climate

The climatic conditions of northern Cyrenaica vary from humid and sub-humid on the coast, to typically Mediterranean on the plateau, and desert to the south. There is a cyclic pattern, with a long period of drought occurring in the summer (Buru 1960, p.50). The winter rainfall is heaviest over the mountains, and causes serious problems of soil erosion in the flooded valleys. The amount of rainfall averages more than 400mm per year, but the actual amount year by year or month by month can fluctuate markedly (Buru 1960, p.50). There are also a number of naturally occurring springs, especially in the area east of Cyrene (Perkins and Goodchild 2003, pp.10-11), although in general "the springs lie too deep and the water table is too far beneath the surface" (Moret Léon 1936, p.566).

Sandro Stucchi (1975, cited in Ward-Perkins and Goodchild 2003, p.3) has argued that there was a distinct climatic change in late antiquity, involving a marked reduction

in rainfall, and although this interpretation has been controversial, it has been pointed out that there is evidence of an increased use of cisterns and water irrigation systems from late antiquity. However, it is difficult to judge clearly whether this transformation is related to a change in the climate (becoming more arid) or, perhaps more likely, to a more extensive exploitation of the territory leading to the need of a more organized water supply system (Moret Léon 1936, p.568-569; see 1.5.2). In support of this latter suggestion, it has to be said that there does not seem to have been any change in the rainfall pattern in more recent times, from the end of antiquity to the modern period (Ward-Perkins and Goodchild 2003, p.1).

1.5 History of Cyrenaica - colonisation and cultivation

The region of Cyrenaica has a long history of occupation, which dates back to the prehistoric period. The important geographical position of the territory of Cyrenaica has often, in fact, been the object of colonisations and conquest.

1.5.1 The early occupation

The earliest inhabitants of Cyrenaica seem to have been "primitive workers of stones who, as in the whole of North Africa, have left abandoned on the surface of the ground thousands of dressed flints" (Moret Léon 1936, p.571)[7]. But in post-prehistoric times, Cyrenaica has always been principally dependent on agriculture, both as necessary for life and as a source of wealth. There is evidence of agriculture and the raising of livestock going back thousands of years (Moret Léon 1936, pp.572-573). A very large part of the area, however, has always been characterised by the arid desert with a few

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[7] 'des primitifs tailleurs de pierres qui, comme dans toute l'Afrique du Nord, ont abandonné à la surface du sol des milliers de silex taillés' (Moret Léon 1936, p.571, trans D.F. Girardet de L'isle). "Après les âges préhistoriques, la Cyrénaïque, tout comme l'Afrique du Nord encore, fut peuplée par les Libyens, ancêtres probables des Berbères actuels et dont nous ne savons que peu de choses, sinon qu'ils ne connaissaient pas le Chameau, vivait sous des abris de feuillage et pratiquaient la culture ambulante des céréales, ainsi que l'élevage des moutons et des chèvres' (in post-prehistoric times, Cyrenaica, like the rest of North Africa still, was peopled by the Libyans, probable ancestors of present-day Berbers, about whom we know little except that they knew nothing of the camel, lived in thatched shelters, and practised a semi-nomadic cultivation of cereals, as well as the rearing of sheep and goats) (Moret Léon 1936, pp.572-573, trans D.F.Girardet de L'isle).

small oases scattered irregularly in the south (Buru 1960, p.222), the fertile and productive land confined to the northern region.

The recorded history of Cyrenaica is of succeeding waves of conquest and colonisation of a gradually altering settled population, whose mix of elements faced each new invasion with what it had absorbed into its native stock of the previous one. We can distinguish four main waves of invasion and settlement: Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Arab.

The country was first colonized by Greek immigrants from the island of Thera, who took control of the Green Mountain, the most fertile part and redistributed the native population. The Greek immigrants founded Cyrene and Barce in about 630BCE; and these cities enjoyed a monopoly of the much prized Silphium plant[8] which grew in the steppe zone to the south of the plateau, and evolved an agriculture which became very prosperous, thanks to intensive irrigation (Buru 1960, p.222; Moret Léon 1936, p.573): "The leader of the settlers became their king and took the name of Battus, and his son that of Arcesilaus. Under his grandson, Battus II, there was a large influx of new settlers from Crete and the Peloponnese, and the colony became prosperous and important (Classical Companion 1951, see under Colonization §4). The colony attained great prosperity, both as a centre for trade with the Libyan natives, and by reason of the Cyrenaica export of silphium, a plant possessing medicinal properties and growing abundantly in the region. Between about 630 B.C. and 450 B.C. eight kings of Cyrene bore alternately the names of Battus... and Arcesilaus (Classsical Companion 1951, see under Cyrene)".

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[8] "σίλφιον...an umbelliferous plant, the juice of which was used in food and medicine...eatable, esp. mashed up with cheese...and having a very strong flavour...It grew largely in the district of Cyrene, and was an article of export" (Liddell and Scott 1897, see under σίλφιον; see also 1.5.4).

1.5.2 The Roman period

Cyrenaica became a Roman Province in 74BC. It was a senatorial province under Augustus with an organised defensive system." Although Cyrenaica ranked, under the earlier Empire, as a senatorial province,[9] it was too exposed to barbarian attack to be left undefended; and there is ample evidence that it had its own garrison - probably a small one - from the first century A.D. onwards (Goodchild 1976, p.195).

The consequence of the Roman invasion of a colony, which nevertheless retained much of its Greek character and organisation (Moret Léon 1936, p.573), was that the native inhabitants began to live on the coast and away from the cities, so that the further expansion of agriculture began to be very local, based on village and farm (Buru 1960, p.222). The beginning of the Roman period in Cyrenaica saw agricultural development only in areas of abundant rainfall such as Cyrene, El-Merj and al-Gubba. This local irrigation was particularly important because the main waterways flowed directly down the escarpment into the sea with (see 1.4.2) no wide coastal plain to catch and make use of them: "The springs on the Jebel certainly [would] have served to irrigate some of the fields in their immediate vicinity, but, generally speaking, the Roman farmer in Cyrenaica depended on his own skill at getting the maximum value from rains. However, cisterns were needed for men and beasts. As previously noted, their capacity was too limited to allow their use for irrigation. Dams were a rarity, probably because the major water-courses flow down the escarpment into the sea with no considerable coastal plain (Buru 1960, pp.223-224)".

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[9] In republican days, a Roman province was governed by a proconsul, often intent upon self-enrichment, with autocratic powers; and the system became seriously corrupt. "Conditions changed under the empire. Augustus divided the provinces into two classes, (1) the more settled and richer provinces, such as Sicily and Africa, where no legions were required. These remained under senatorial administration and were still governed by proconsuls under the old system; (2) the imperial provinces, on the frontiers, where legions were quartered, such as Syria. These were under the direct control of the emperor" (Classical Companion1951, see under *Provinces*).

Social and economic organisation during the Greek occupation and the following Roman imperial period resulted in much more developed agriculture than is the case today (Buru 1960, p.213). Well organised and continuous attempts, continuing into the Roman and Byzantine periods, were made to defend this skilfully managed and productive region from attack by nomadic tribes (which had already begun in late antiquity; see 1.1) from the interior, "who now knew and used the camel"[10] (Moret Léon 1936, p.573; see n.1):

Starting from A.D. 390 onwards, Cyrenaica was under attack by local tribes. These were the Austurians, probably coming from the Syrtic Gulf [11] After the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century, the sense of Romanness nevertheless survived: "empires can survive as identities after they disappear as polities" (Conant 2012, p.1). And indeed, by the middle of the 6th century, "the East Roman or Byzantine empire managed to re-establish control of Africa" (Conant 2012, p.2).

1.5.3 The Byzantine period

Further east, the Byzantines took over control of Cyrenaica, a desirable land principally for its fertile conditions (Goodchild 1976, p.206). While Tripolitania was only conquered on the coast, the whole territory of Cyrenaica became part of the Byzantine Empire. (Goodchild 1976, p.206).

Agriculture in Cyrenaica seems to have survived largely unaltered after the Arab conquest (Buru 1960, pp.223-224), which was so rapid and seems to have met with so little resistance in the middle of the 7th century, that Sir John Bagot Glubb, a writer

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[10] 'qui maintenant connaissaient et utilisaient le Chameau' (Moret Léon 1936, p.573, trans D.F. Girardet de L'isle).

[11] Goodchild 1976, p.195; for discussion of the Asturiani, see Mattingly 1995; for the identification of Syrtica, in modern times the Gulf of Sidra, see Lewis and Short 1945 under Syrtis; Armatius or Harmatus, son of Flavius Plinta (fl 418-438); for Mazices or Mazaces, see Lewis and Short 1945 under both these names; Upper and Lower Libya were so named by Diocletian in his reorganisation of 296AD, when Cyrenaica was split into the provinces of Libya Superior, ie the Pentapolis, and Libya Inferior, see Fage 1978.

"exceptionally well qualified to discuss Arab warfare" (Goodchild 1976, p255), has written that:

"the welcome offered to the Arabs in the Western desert and Barka seems to suggest that the people in this area were themselves partly Arab" (Goodchild 1976, p.255). There is, as Goodchild comments, essentially nothing to support this suggestion, but "The essential problem is how the Arabs broke through the Byzantine defences of the Cyrenaica mountains, defences which are, even today, extraordinarily impressive. There is certainly no known fact, or even probability, to support Sir John Glubb's suggestion that the Arabs were "welcomed" in the Western Desert and Barka by their own kinsmen. But they were welcomed, in Libya as in Egypt, by a Christian population of Monophysite doctrine which had been led to believe that these new and powerful allies could destroy their Orthodox oppressors (Goodchild 1976, p.265)".

The discussion of the Byzantine period in Cyrenaica continues into the next section (1.5.4.); and the discussion of the christianisation and then also the islamisation of the region, which has been begun earlier in this chapter (see 1.1 and 1.2), is continued in 1.5.4. and then in the various chapters on individual sites which follow.

1.5.4 The Arab conquest

The Arab conquest of Cyrenaica and of North Africa was initially rapid, with attacks, retreats, further culminating in a complex, developing situation which it is hard to be clear about, but which will be discussed later in this section. The 'consolidation' of that conquest was unobtrusive, certainly in North Africa and so we may suppose further east in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. At least, too, for Cyrenaica, we need to consider carefully what 'consolidation' might mean. What it certainly cannot mean is that the Arab conquest, though rapid in its initial stage, was met by sustained opposition, which meant that the Arab hegemony was under continual threat, and only after several

centuries managed to achieve military security. Almost the opposite was, in fact, the case. 'Consolidation', whatever that might mean (and it might be said that this thesis sets out to define what the consolidation of the Arab victory meant for Cyrenaica) had little to do with strengthening the military grip on the region, because the military grip was, almost from the beginning, sufficient (see, for example, Kaegi 1992). One's sense of the Arab presence consolidated in the centuries following the military victory must rather be of a gradual, very gradual, cultural and religious infiltration. The first sentence, then, of this section must be understood as meaning, not that the Arab conquest was by the skin of the teeth, but that it was to such a degree uncontested that there was no necessity to hasten the process of infiltration artificially. The victory sowed the seeds, but then the natural course of things wrote the rest of the story in the centuries we are concerned with. The picture in Cyrenaica is of a rapid and sharp military beginning, fiercely but briefly opposed, probably only by a small proportion of the whole population, and then fairly rapidly of a coming to terms. The Byzantine military elite in Cyrenaica, to be distinguished from the local population, was already developing by the 4th century into a well organised form of society, and it may be that the Islamic sense that the social elite would be hunters and soldiers, which developed after the victory of the Islamic armies, imitated to some degree the Byzantine model, even after there was little practical need for strong military organisation, the victory being complete (see Kaegi 1982). In North Africa in general, the military effort of the Arab armies as it were prepared the ground for what happened in Cyrenaica. Fifteen years after Muhammad's death in 632 the conquest of North Africa began and continued for a century and a half. The major issue was the growing opposition of the Berber communities. "Viewed from the Orient, the Maghrib appeared intractable, and

a tradition preserved by Abu I-'Arab credits the Caliph 'Umar as calling Ifriqiya the "gateway to hell" (Savage 1954, p.1)."

The "initial military collapse" of the Byzantine defences was followed by the "search for a viable strategy against the Muslims" and the stabilizing for a time of "a viable military front" against the invaders in Palestine, Syria and Byzantine Mesopotamia (Kaegi 1992, p.2; see also Diehl 1894; Pringle 1981; Kaegi 2010). The detail of the first Arab expedition into Pentapolis [i.e. Cyrenaica] which began in the summer of 642, its motivation and its conduct, can be tentatively put together from both Arab and Christian sources, as we shall see now, even though at times they conflict or are lacking. The motivation behind the attack is explained by the 9th century Arab historian, Ibn Abd el-Hakam: "There were a number of basic motives that prompted the Arab commander Amr ibn al-As to the process of conquest in the region located to the west of Egypt: Cyrenaica, or Pentapolisas, as it was called in ancient times. The motivation was fourfold: religious, military, geographical, together with obedience to the orders issued to him as commander in chief of the Army of the Muslims from the Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab [the second Rashidun Caliph, 634-644]. The religious motive was a desire to spread the new religion, and was not a political move towards the subjection of new territory. The military motive for invading the Cyrenaica region was that it belonged administratively to the Byzantine Empire, and might become a haven for Byzantine troops from Egypt, and a base from which they could launch attacks on the Muslim army in Egypt. The geographical motive was to do with the fact that geographically there is no natural separation between Egypt and Cyrenaica, only a semi-desert area, so that Cyrenaica in many historical periods was considered properly a part of Egypt. The two regions also depended upon each other for food products, meat, and clothing and Amr's military initiative could act as an economic

guarantee for the other Muslim regions (Ib Al-Hakam 1961, pp.170-171, author's translation; for original Arabic texts in this thesis, see the Arabic appendix, in this case Arabic appendix, passage 1)."

It is arguable that the Arab expedition into the Pentapolis did not start before the capitulation of Alexandria on the 8th of November 641. The only issue is in fact to consider whether Amr ibn el-As waited for the Byzantine defenders to leave the city (17th September 642) before moving to the west. Some scholars as Butler [Butler 1902] have suggested that they waited for full control of the Pentapolis before going west. Other scholars like Brooks [Brooks 1895, p.345] and Caetani [Caetani 1911, p.532] have suggested an early start of the campaign already in 642, immediately after the take over of Alexandria. This latter view appears to be more probable, that to started the conquest before the winter rains (Goodchild 1967, p.116).

A second expedition to Pentapolis appears to have taken place in 644 or 645 (Goodchild 1967, p.117). What was securely achieved in general by this second expedition is nowhere recorded (Goodchild 1967, p.117), but it did result in the capitulation of Barqa (whose port of Tolmeitha [Ptolemais] became more important than the inland town), which seems to have been at this time a Berber settlement disaffected from Byzantine rule: The Berbers at the site of Barqa were essential for the conquest of the Pentapolis by 'Amr ibn el-As. They occupied the most fertile area of Cyrenaica and their support would certainly allow an easy victory. "Moreover, since they were not strongly Christianised, they could have been easily converted" (Goodchild 1967, p.119).

The Byzantine commander Apollonios had withdrawn to Tocheira, close to Barqa but away from the much less easily defended coastal region, after the campaign of 642. The archaeological evidence, then, confirms what the Coptic chronicler John of Nikiou

says, that: "the Byzantine army withdrew to Tocheira to make a last stand. Excavations of a bath-house in this town, one of the best preserved in Cyrenaica, show that the atrium was removed, and its material used for [the] Byzantine fortress built to the west. John of Nikiou adds that the local magnates joined the governor and the Byzantine army in retreat...A large number of well-to-do citizens of the towns also followed the Byzantine army and subsequently sailed away, abandoning their country (Christides 2000, p.38)".

The shifting patterns of military invasion and defence of this fertile and well managed agricultural area influenced, we may imagine, only from a distance, the sense the less well-to-do inhabitants had of their persisting identity. Even as the invasion was proceeding, it is clear, as the historian Al-Bakri says, that some of the native inhabitants, especially Berbers, came to a satisfactory arrangement with the invaders: "at least in the region of Pentapolis things went gently, and the native inhabitants agreed to pay a tribute, 'jizya', to the invaders of thirteen thousand dinars" (Al-Bakri 1857, pp.4-5, author's translation; Arabic appendix, passage 2).

It certainly seems particularly the case that, from the 7th to the 9th centuries, what we may call Islamic and Coptic Christian life went on side by side, that the political and military victors left in effect ample room for things to go on as they had done before. Excavation, for instance, of town houses at Tolmeitha suggests that domestic occupation of at least parts of this coastal town went on well into the Islamic period (Ward-Perkins et al 1986, p.149), and that this urban life was far from being merely 'squatter occupation': (Ward-Perkins et al 1986, p.152; see also Brunschvig 1947; and also Alsayyad 1993, especially p.29 and n.28, on 'squatting' as 'a continuation of traditional Islamic laws').

Sherds of glazed mediaeval pottery indeed, dating from the 10th to the 13th centuries, found on the surface at Tolmeitha suggest that occupation of this town went on for six hundred years after the Islamic invasion, a long squat (Kennet 1991, p.83,p.88).

The general picture in the centuries that followed the Islamic invasion is that the arrival of Islam did not determine the end of the cities and that the Islamic conquest did not bring about many changes, but mostly integrated with existing cultures. Cities were not destroyed or damaged (King 1989, p.194; see also Alsayyad 1996, p.91 on the "nature and meaning of Islamic cities"). As might be expected, the overlay also led to slow and steady penetration of the new faith, so that much of the Berber population, for instance, had been converted by the early 8th century (King 1989, p.194). It is important to note, too, that the kind of Christianity locally practised in Cyrenaica differed sharply from the 'official' Christianity of the Byzantine rule, and that there was considerable hostility between the two versions of the Christian faith.[12]

Early Islamic urban sites are mostly constructed on top of, or closely beside, and as a continuation of, Roman and Byzantine settlements, developing and reusing rather than building anew. Sometimes there is evidence of damage suffered by Christian buildings in the early period after the conquest, as at Berenike (King 1989, p.195),[13] but we may suppose that, for the most part, change was natural and slow and inevitable. A bath house of Roman origin at Tocheira, for instance, went on being used in the Muslim

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[12] The Coptic, or Monophysite, body of Christians was centred in Egypt, and recognised the authority of the Monophysite Patriarch of Alexandria, deposed by the Council of Chalcedon in 451CE. 'Orthodox Patriarchs and other officials, ecclesiastical and civil, were sent from Constantinople to Egypt, but the mass of the people was fanatically attached to Monophysite error' (Addis and Arnold 1951, see under *Copts*). The Christians of Cyrenaica were also Monophysite, and felt similarly oppressed by the Byzantine authorities. Monophysite Christians hold that just as there is only one person in Christ, so there is only one nature. The general body of Christendom, at the Council of Chalcedon, condemned this view, and maintained that in Christ, after the Incarnation, there was one person but two distinct natures, of God and man (Addis and Arnold 1951, see under *Chalcedon, General Council of*).

[13] "A number of buildings at Sidi Khrebish [ie Berenike] have been associated with settlement in the early Islamic period, including a church and neighbouring buildings, and the city wall. Excavation at the church has shown that this early sixth century AD foundation was damaged in the early Islamic period, and that it was then reused for another, apparently secular, purpose [the reference is to Lloyd 1977]." It may be that to describe the kind of alteration made here as 'damage' is to say no more than that the purpose of the building became secular after changes were made to it, that there is a break here between one kind of use and another rather than a continuity.

period, apparently for the same purposes (ie to be distinguished from the church described in n.6), but had an "Arabic inscription inscribed crudely over the main door to the atrium of the bath", consisting of the name of Allah (King 1989, p.195; see also Jones 1984, p.111).

Some new towns arose in the centuries after the conquest, but in general it was the Roman and Byzantine settlements which provided the basis for such Islamic organisation and rule as there was. The town of Barqa [spelt in Greek and then Latin as Barca or Barcae], for instance, a Greek, then Roman, then Byzantine settlement, which had profited greatly from the silphium trade (see 1.5.1), and was inhabited, as we have seen, at the time of the Islamic conquest, by Berbers predisposed to sympathy with the new faith, gave its name to the whole region of Cyrenaica. Barqa became subsequently the centre of the region and El Bakri, in the middle of the 11th century, described Barqa as a city, "situated in a country where the soil and the buildings were red, and the clothes of those who settled their adopted the same colour; and he stated that provisions were at all times very abundant and cheap in the area. The cattle spread over its pastures, and a great number were exported to Egypt and slaughtered there. Various kinds of fruits and honey and wool were also exported to Egypt, the wool being prepared in a place near Barca, called Maga, situated on a high mountain, of difficult access and impossible to ascend on horseback." (Al-Bakri 1857, pp.5-6, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 3)

The sense this section may give is that the Arab conquest added to rather than radically changed the pattern of life in Cyrenaica. The conquest was not bitterly contested in a prolonged struggle lasting a long time. It was even, to some considerable extent, welcomed by the often disaffected population which had hitherto lived under Byzantine rule. Most importantly, the indigenous way of life persisted, with

its overwhelmingly agricultural emphasis. The major sites to be examined later in this thesis were cities set in the midst of well-ordered agricultural life. What was urban about them had to face that strongly prevailing contrary force. The detailed pattern of production of agricultural production in Cyrenaica has at every stage remained much the same, no matter who invaded and who retreated, no matter what the complexity of urban life, including olive oil, wine, figs, dates, wheat, wool, almonds; although in the modern period the silphium plant, which contributed so much to the economy of the Greek cities, and was a major export from the region, has simply and entirely disappeared, it not now even being certain what kind of plant it must have been.

1.6 History of Cyrenaica - Language, Roads, and Trade

This section will continue the theme already touched on in this introduction, of localness, rootedness, and acceptance of diversity; it is a theme, which will be developed in more detail in the chapters following this one. But one aspect of Cyrenaica history has not yet been commented on in some introductory way, and that is language.

Goodchild remarks that Cyrenaica "remained Greek-speaking until the Islamic invasions" whereas Tripolitania was a Latin-speaking province (Goodchild 1976, p.145); but it seems clear that both these languages "of elite Roman cultural identity" (Conant 2012, p.363) long survived in some form the Arab conquest and the hegemony of Arabic; and the history of communications and trade is not only about roads and ports and produce, but about the languages in which the transactions of daily life are made "For hundreds of years after the conquest, Afariqa continued to speak a dialect of Latin that Al-Idrisi (AD 1100-c.1165) called al-latini al-afriqi or 'African Latin'. This dialect was spoken in Gafsa into the twelfth century at least (Conant 2012, p.363)".

The probable linguistic complexity of Cyrenaica during the whole chronological period under review in this chapter would challenge useful overall comment (see also Clackson 2015); and the difficulty here introduces us to the difficulties in general in this section of Chapter 1. Communications and trade, unless they concern, for instance, so remarkable and based on an export trade as that in silphium, have to do with the fine detail of everyday life. Where people travelled, from the places in which they lived, and what on these journeys they bought and sold, during the more than a thousand years surveyed in this chapter, can be the subject only of rather vague generalisation. Any move to some more detailed account switches immediately into a precise focus

on evidence relating to exact time and place which is necessarily of limited validity. That broad area between the *absolutely precise* and the *entirely general* is one almost ideally fitted for the description of political events, or even of agriculture; but will not do so well with communications and trade. But some things can be said: that "the lines of communication in ancient Cyrenaica ran from east to west, rather than from south to north" (Goodchild 1976, p.152), so that: "A major route across the territory linked the frontier between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania to Berenike, and Berenike to Taucheira(Tocra), (Tolmeitha) Ptolemais, Cyrene, Darnis and thence across the Marmarica to Egypt. There were branch roads to Barka (Barqa) and Apollonia/Sozusa and a network of tracks (largely uncharted) which provided access to the smaller settlements not touched by the main roads. It is probable that many travellers preferred to move by sea during the sailing-seasons and that the small ports dotted along the coast were in consequence more important than they seem to us" (Perkins and Goodchild 2003, p.2; see also Fulford 1989).

In the early 5th century Synesius of Cyrene, bishop of Ptolemais [Tolmeitha], sent letters to his many friends overseas from a small port, Phycus (the ruins of this port lying at Zaviet Hammama north of El-Hania) (Goodchild 1976, pp.152 and 240), but these letters had to cross "broken country traversed only by rough mule-tracks" to get from Cyrene (close to which lay the country estate where Synesius seems to have written most of his letters) to Phycus. Had he written them from his town house in Cyrene itself, they would have been sent from the port of Apollonia, which was linked to Cyrene by "a first-class highway" (Goodchild 1976, p.241). The difference between one of the few major roads, at this time in Cyrenaica, and almost anything else in the way of a road, must have been stark, and taken for granted. You made the best of whatever there was. Where the roads were bad and also the times were bad, as they

were when Synesius was writing, not only letters but some small volume of goods probably went on stubbornly being sent and arriving.

The archaeological and other evidence suggests that, in general, the "volume of goods imported into the North African provinces was negligible" in Roman times and largely consisted of luxury items (Pentz 2002, p.140); so that trade was chiefly in exported goods. The territory was very fertile and the main products of the region, as for the rest of North Africa, were grain, wine and olive oil (Pentz 2002, pp.140-141).

The volume of trade in general in the Mediterranean, and so also from Cyrenaica, seems to have fluctuated over the centuries. It has been suggested that it declined between the 4th and the early 5th and was boosted again in the 6th, early 7th and 8th century, possibly continuing into the 9th century, (Pentz 2002, p.139, n.560).

What can be said with somewhat more certainty, however, is that the distribution patterns of distinctive pottery and also of amphorae suggests that there was not much in the way of internal trade in North Africa in the early Arabic centuries (Pentz 2002, p.143), and that the dangers of sea transport made even trade *along* that coast from one point to another a difficult and uncertain business (Pentz 2002, p.146). We may suppose that in Cyrenaica, a largely non-existent internal road system and the uncertainties of sea transport from little port to little port along the coast made everyday life a very local and self-sufficient system. There are some exceptions, however, to this general picture. Kennet estimates that: 30% of glazed ware in Cyernaica in the late 10th and early 11th century was mostly imported from Sicily (Kennet 1994, p.279). He points also however to the decline in the medieval period of the substantial coastal settlements of the Classical period which would have afforded facilities for long-distance shipping, and suggests that goods arrived into the small ports which remained in Cyrenaica in the mediaeval period by a system of what has been called

'tramping', transferred from larger vessels and taken along the coast from small port to small port, as a pedlar might hawk his goods on the roads (Kennet 1994, pp.280-281).

All this, to be sure, is in stark contrast to what seem to be the volume and the wealth of Islamic trade in other parts of the Muslim empire. And now we are not speaking of ordinary everyday life but of great enterprises. Banaji suggests persuasively that it is Islam in the medieval period which lies behind the later rise of European capitalism: "concepts of profit, capital, and the accumulation of capital are all found in the Arabic sources of the ninth to fourteenth centuries" (Banaji 2007, p.57). Again, by the 8th century, the Arabs had broken "the Berber monopoly of the trans-Saharan routes and sparked a long period of unbroken prosperity for the towns of Morocco", and a little later, in the 14th and 15th centuries, "North Africa with its supply of gold...became the driving force of the entire Mediterranean" (Banaji 2007, p.59, 60). This is not to speak of trade with the Far East, which "was conceivably the most lucrative accumulation [of capital] in the eighth to tenth centuries" (Banaji 2007, p.59).

The localness of life in Cyrenaica during the whole period of time from the 7th to the 10th centuries might suggest that change when it came, of a political or military kind, had to contend with forces which would always have made it less complete than one might have expected if merely the written political or military record is consulted. For so long as a developed system of agriculture, adapted to the landscape and the climate of the region, continued more or less as it had always been, that would have provided the basis for a kind of self-sufficient everyday life which would tend more to absorb than yield to incoming change. Cyrenaica, in the picture of it which archaeology produces for the seventh to the tenth centuries, is a long way from the wealth of the

trade with the Orient and the modernity and change of the great cities of Egypt and North Africa.

1.7 Inscriptions

Some of the inscriptions contained in this work are contained in Enas Bubtana's MA thesis which was written in Arabic. These inscriptions are contained in this work, and made for the first time accessible in English, however the thesis also includes new inscriptions which have been recorded on the field during the PhD by the Author in collaboration with the Department of Antiquity of Libya - Benghazi.   All the Kufic inscriptions recorded in the different sites will be analysed in each chapter. The Author has seen and read all of them personally, and in some cases reread and corrected previous transcription and decipherment. In order to allow the reader to approach the reading clearly a few points need to be made at the outset.

Arabic memorial inscriptions in the Islamic monuments cover a number of topics. There are religious topics to do with the Islamic faith in different forms, with quotations from the Quran appropriate to the particular context. There is also remembrance of a person or an event or an important achievement. The inscriptions are generally written on marble or stone. They are, in general, memorial plates or tombstones, in various artistic or decorative shapes. In the city of Barqa (el-Merj) there was found a collection of Kufic inscriptions carved in two distinct ways, bas relief (letters raised above the surface of the stone) and inset engraving (letters below the surface level). The origin of the concept of burial stelai goes back to before the emergence of Islam; stelai have been discovered which confirm this, for example the inscription of Namara (328CE) and the inscription of Umm al-Jaml (?6 years earlier). The first was written in two scripts: early Kufic and Nabataean; the second was written in Kufic alone. The Arabs continued to inscribe burial stelai to their dead after their adoption of Islam and possibly

the reason for the spread of the use of stelai is that many of them travelled from their homes as propagators of Islam in invasions and pilgrimages and were martyred or settled in a new country where they spent their lives.

However, the eastern Islamic Empire is generally speaking, richer than the west in these kinds of funeral inscriptions and possibly the reason for this is that the Berbers of North Africa, in adopting Islam, maintained a most rigorous adherence to its spirit, and perhaps they saw in the erecting of headstone on graves an offence against the teachings of Islam. (Hajj 1968, p.13; Bubtana 2007, pp.15-16)

The majority of Islamic grave headstones include the following:

1. "In the name of Allah the compassionate the merciful." The beginning of the inscription with the Islamic profession of faith (the *bismillah*) shows the desire of Muslims to commence their activities by mentioning God.

2. Verses of the Quran or praise in the mentioning of God, his wisdom and justice.

3. The identifying of the dead person by mentioning his name; and standard religious expressions - like the two creeds and the recognition of the hour of resurrection, and Paradise.

4. The date of death and sometimes after death a request to God to have mercy upon the dead person, and incitement to the reader to ask for compassion for the dead person and for all those who say prayers for him or her (Bubtana 2007, pp.15-16).

The following very famous inscription will perhaps bring to life more vividly what has been said so far in general terms about inscriptions.

Kufic inscriptions are normally characterised by beautiful writing, but also a second group of texts needs to be considered, which are the incised inscriptions. The case of Abd al-Malik (Caliph 65AH/687CE-86AH/708CE), the third caliph of the Ummayads

who wrote a short text himself on some rocks in the area of Jabal Hisma, in the extreme north-west of Arabia (Imbert 2015, p.67), is significant in this respect. The careful writing consists simply of his name, but it occurs in what seems a space slightly reserved apart from an area of other writing on the rocks. The name is inscribed simply by itself, and clearly nothing has been lost of the writing. There is no indication of status, and no religious indication at all. The first thing to be suggested, perhaps, is that there is great difficulty about distinguishing between *inscriptions* and *graffiti*. A graffito, distinguished from an inscription, is normally thought to be a very short piece of unimportant scribble, whereas an inscription both advertises itself more solemnly (in a more careful hand, perhaps enclosed in some sort of border, and set in some significant place) and also gives contextual information, a date perhaps, or a mention of a death, and most importantly with Islamic inscriptions a clear indication of religious belief. In the case of Abd al-Malik, we have a piece of writing which confusingly falls into the category both of inscription and of graffito. We might, one supposes, describe it as a *superior* kind of graffito.

The habit of writing on rocks, as has been said, antedated Islam (though strangely it seems not to have done so in Cyrenaica itself). There was what Imbert calls "une tradition graffitologique très dynamique" (Imbert 2015, p.61) in Arabia. Graffiti are found everywhere in the steppes of Arabia and the near East, and the Islamic writing in early Kufic script inserts itself easily into this much more widespread habit. The second thing to emphasise, then, is that the Arabic habit of writing on rocks merely *continued into* the Islamic period, and that the core of the habit (as it is not with modern graffiti) was the identification of oneself, the writing of one's name. What we then are perhaps to say is that the religious expressions almost always found in any kind of Islamic writing which attempts self-identification is not so much an expression of

religious *fervour* as an extension of the identification by name which had always been the habit: so that, after the name, one added, as it were to complete the identification, 'the Muslim'. If what is here said is true, then it does not seem greatly to matter whether the man who became the third Umayyad Caliph was already a believer or not when he wrote his name on the rocks. It may be that the habit of adding to one's name that additional bit of information, 'the Muslim', took a little time to become established. It would perhaps have been necessary, in the early years when Muslims were relatively scarce, to put in such an additional indication. It must have been particularly useful and apposite even later in Cyrenaica, where the population was a religious mixture. Very much later, of course, the value of a religious text as a distinguishing mark must have fallen away a lot in places where everybody was Islamic, and then it would have gone on being used either for reasons of religious fervour and devotion, or as the usual conventional habit.

Abd Al-Malik just wrote his name. He speaks to us, as it were, nakedly. Here, in the nakedness of writings so short that they are usually called graffiti, is their steady and real importance. As Imbert says, in these very short and laconic writings, "la distance historique semble s'abolir," the remoteness of history seems to vanish (Imbert 2015, p.72). From across the distance of many centuries, some other human being says, "it's me here". This aspect of the effect upon a modern discoverer of what one now more willingly speaks of as graffiti (not now second-class citizens, as it were) is one which one feels connects importantly with the whole drift of the argument in this thesis. The thesis argument is do with the intimacy of everyday life which underlies any grand gestures, with the possibility of living in what we can properly and confidently call a city, that nevertheless does not define itself by any of the usual grand urban gestures

that we associate with the Greeks and the Romans, and later with the Fatimids in Tunisia and Egypt.

There are the occasional records of historically grand people carving out their names and abundant identification in graffiti later on in the history of Islam, of course. But these seem not convey so much human feel, oddly, as the quieter writings here collected in individual chapters for each separate site studied in Cyrenaica. The Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun (203AH/825CE-223AH/845CE), on a military campaign, left a record of himself. In a church (Imbert 2015, p.61). Well of course, he would put it there, in a church. The Islamic faith is by this time well established, and he is fighting for his version of it.

1.7.1 The Early Islamic cities debates and open questions

In order to develop the discussion in depth and in line with the current debates on the early Islamic city, ahead of discussing the evidence, it is necessary to assess the current state of the debate. When looking at the early Islamic cities in North Africa, scholars have to face first of all a substantial lack of data due to the large excavations carried out in the colonial period. Despite the fact that between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, North Africa was extensively excavated, the investigations were mostly focussing on the Roman evidence and the churches, while all the early Islamic periods were removed with no record. Work on the archives of old excavations have shown that most of the classical cities continued to be occupied up until at least the 10th century.[14] Due to the massive destruction of the stratigraphy, it is still extremely difficult to reconstruct the archaeological evidence, and identify trends and the nature of these cities in the Medieval period.

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[14] The first pioneer work was conducted by Leone (Leone 2007 and 2013), the trend has been followed more recently in Fenwick 2013 and 2019. For a very recent statues quaestionis see Bockmann, Leone, Von Rummell 2019.

On the other side there are a number of newly founded cities or completely refurbished ones, where the situation is further complicated on the one side by the lack of data or the continuity of occupation until modern times. The situation is further complicated by the lack of contemporary sources from the 8th and 9th century. Arabic sources being mostly unrecorded. Most of the Arabic sources belong to the later periods

The organisation and the structure of these new cities is still extremely difficult to identify and to verify. In both cases it is very difficult to define these transformations. This research offers a unique opportunity to reassess the evidence on a large regional scale.

The typical features of the early Islamic cities have been mostly identified with courtyard mosques and forts (Northedge 2017), and in a few cases it has been possible to identify the presence of houses (see for instance Fenwick 2019), although the excavations make it often difficult to define chronologies.[15] The definition and the identification of earlier mosques in North Africa is still very much underdeveloped. Unfortunately, to date there have not been clearly identified mosques in classical cities which continued to be occupied. Cyrenaica is the only North African region to offer some evidence, suggesting the location and the characteristic of these early features, shedding new light on where these early religious buildings are to be found.

The recent proposed reconsideration of the organisation of early Islamic cities in North Africa, has offered evidence which had already been recorded in the late Byzantine period, when the classical cities developed in two different directions: towards cities in nuclei, characterised by clusters of inhabited areas with the presence of forts, churches and houses, and cities with a city wall and forts to protect the city in case of

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[15] Belalis Major, in Africa Proconsularis, is one of the few settlements where the excavations have identified 8century level, although the stratigraphy and the pottery has never been dated and the evidence on which such chronologies have been identified are not clearly explained (Mahjoubi 1978). At Belalis Maior has also been recorded a fort inserted inside one of the churches of the city.

attack. This trend seems to continue into the early Islamic period, the forts becoming a more typical presence in urban areas. Also in this case our understanding of the role of the forts and the way the strategic protective system developed in North Africa is still very problematic to identify.[16]

The situation is further complicated by the fact that, especially for North Africa, most of the scholars who have addressed and looked at the early Islamic cities do not read Arabic, and have approached the study without considering in depth the contemporary sources and the inscriptions. This work aims to overcome this problem.

The cities considered in this research belongs to different categories: some of them were classical cities which continued to be occupied, and some of them where built in the Fatimid period. These settlements present different evidence and they can be well distinguished, but traditional scholarship has tended to see them as one unique model of urban settlement.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

In this complex panorama the present research aims to collect all the data from Cyrenaica to evaluate the impact of the Islamic conquest on the territory and how the urban landscape was modified. Most of the cases analysed are from Cyrenaica, but it has been necessary also to include some key sites in Tripolitania, as for instance Medina Sultan (i.e Surt/Sirte), because it is essential to discuss the transition and the connection between the eastern and the western part of Libya.

The thesis will first consider the transition of classical cities and it will look in particular at their transition and transformation (Chapter 2). It will then consider the regional centre of power, Barqa and it will reassess the evidence of El Merj, where the

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[16] The more comprehensives work on the fortification of North Africa by Pringle 1981 and Djelloul 1999 are a collection of all the available information, but the research did not include excavations and specific research, these analyses therefore could not fully address issues of chronologies and dating, leaving this aspect still problematic.

archaeological evidence does not seem to correspond to the importance of the capital city (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 will focus on the key moment of evolution of early Islamic North Africa, the Fatimid period, the rulers of North Africa in the 10th century.

Chapter 5 will consider the new foundations, and will consider Ajdabiyah and Chapter 6 Medina Sultan (i.e Surt/Sirte). The analysis will focus on the structure and organisation of the new foundations. The analysis of the different settlements will consider buildings and structures, as well as inscriptions and written documents, in the attempt at drawing together as much evidence as possible. Chapter 7 will contain the conclusions.

Chapter 2 : The Evolution of pre-existing urban settlements: Taucheira (i.e Tocra 2A); Tolmeitha (i.e Ptolemais2B); Ras el Hilal 2C

2.   The aim of this chapter

This chapter aims to discuss critically the evidence from three cities of Cyrenaica which saw a long period of occupation. Tolmeitha (Ptolemais) and Taucheira (Tocra), were Greek foundations, Roman and Byzantine cities. Despite the impact of the Italian excavations which removed the later evidence of occupation without recording it, it is possible to draw some evidence and to discuss some initial trends. With the aim of looking at the reuse of early settlement, the case of Ras el Hilal will also be considered. Although here only a church has been uncovered, it is very likely that the buildings were set in a settlement subdivided into two parts, one in the lowlands, while the church is located in the uplands.

The aim of this chapter is to reconsider critically and unitarily all the evidence in order to enhance as far as possible our understanding of the transformation of ancient cities in Cyrenaica.

2.1 Taucheira (i.eTocra)

2.1.1 Geography and history

Taucheira was originally founded by Cyrene, at a point where the coastal plain is about 6km wide, it was one of the Cyrenaica Pentapolis. It maintained its importance for long, in fact at the time of the Arab invasion it was the last stronghold of the Byzantine administration of the whole region. The Byzantine commander Apollonius withdrew to the city from Apollonia in the fort of Taucheira, which was constructed in haste on this occasion (Jones 1985, pp.27-28). The choice probably depended on the important strategic location of Tocra, as well as the presence of   many spring waters reaching

the city.[17] Goodchild (1967, p.121) points out also the strong strategic location of Taucheira. In fact, both Apollonia and Tocra had walls, and they could have both resisted attacks. The strategic location of Tocra probably made the difference in the choice. In fact it is located where the coastal plain extended south-westwards towards Benghazi, giving room for military manoeuvre. It would have been easier to receive reinforcements from Tripolitania or to allow a withdrawal by land in that direction, whereas the only way in and out of Apollonia was by sea. The shore of Tocra certainly offered, by contrast, no satisfactory natural harbour; although the British archaeological investigation in the 1960s and early 1970s uncovered considerable evidence of an artificial port constructed in the Hellenistic period (Hardy-Guilbert 2010, p.88). (See Fig. 2)

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[17] Fuaad Bantaher, in his study of a large building apparently at some time in Christian use to the South of the East church in Taucheira, does however point to evidence that could well indicate an aqueduct, even though the supply of water internal to the city was abundant. He notes, too, that if there were no aqueduct at Taucheira, it would be the only city of the Pentapolis without one (Bentaher 1999, p26).
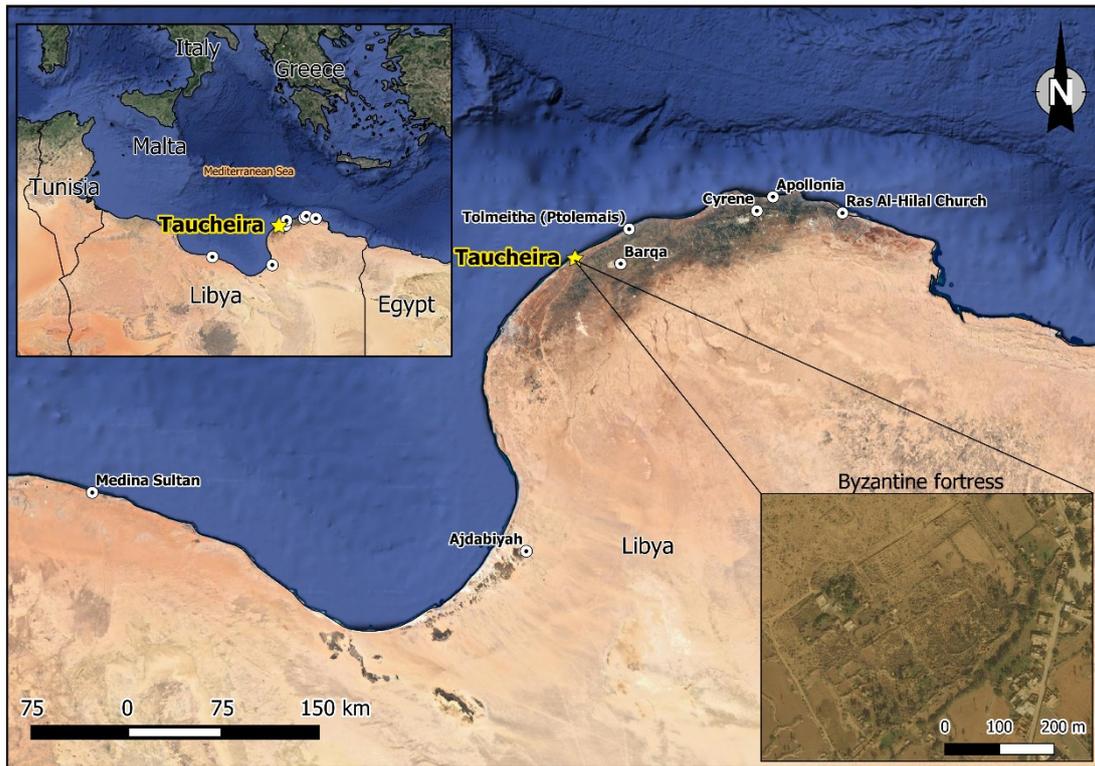
Fig. 2 Close-up map of Taucheira (by Author elaborated from Google Earth).

In the first rapid attack of the invading Arab armies in the mid-7th century, they simply by-passed Taucheira and its well defended garrison; it was only taken in a second phase when the region had already been conquered. Taucheira was an important Greek and Roman city, and held an important strategic position in the Byzantine period; but its location was not essential in the Arab period and the movement of the conquest inside the region. As in many classical cities in North Africa, the city was probably occupied until the 10th century (Kenrick 2013, pp.49-63), until after the migration of the tribes of Bani Hilal and Salim (424AH/1046CE), who changed the face of the region in political and population terms.

Arab sources talking about the expansion into North Africa are silent on Taucheira, they refer instead to the conquest of the whole region, which began in the summer of

32AH/654CE, led by Amr ibn al-As[18], who completed his mission and who made an agreement with the Byzantine citizens (Rūms).

The contemporary Christian Bishop, John of Nicosia, refers to the city of Taucheira or Dushira, as having played a major role in the Byzantine confronting of the Islamic forces, becoming, as I have said above, the last bastion of the Byzantine defenders. After the arrival of the conquering Arabs at the capital Sousse, the governor of the province, Abulianos (ie. Apollonius), accompanied by his forces and the wealthy of the capital city, withdrew to the strongly fortified city of Tocra, which seems to have become the de facto capital and residence of the governor after the fall of Sousse. This change led to the strengthening of defensive measures, including the construction of a fortified palace (castle) inside the city for the governor and his soldiers. Bishop John does not know how the city fell into the hands of Muslims, but it is assumed to have fallen, as Goodchild also suggests, during the second campaign in the territory, at some point between 34AH/656CE and 35AH/657CE.

2.1.2 Taucheira in the books of travellers and geographers

Al-Idrisi, in the 12th century, writes a brief note on Tocra which seems to be the only mention in medieval Arabic sources of the town. He writes: "Qafiz is a castle built in the middle of the plain of Berenice...from there to Tocra is a journey of two day-stages. Taucheira is a large fortified village of considerable importance and well populated. The inhabitants are a group of Berbers. The fields surrounding the place are well

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[18] Amr ibn al-'As (c585CE-42AH/664CE) was most noted for being the leader of the Muslim conquest of Egypt in 640CE. He was one of the Sahaba, who rose to power quickly after his conversion in 7AH/629CE. He was the founder of the Egyptian city of Fustat and built the mosque there which is named after him.

cultivated and watered by little irrigation systems,[19] which enable the growing of vegetables and small beans. A wood surrounds the town on all sides" (Al-Idrissi 1866, p.102, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 4).

It is difficult to understand why there should be only this single mention of Tocra in the medieval Islamic record, and there is one possible explanation. Al-Yaqoubi in the middle of the 9th century mentions a town called Ajiyah. He says: "between the town of Barqa and the sea is a distance of six miles; on the coast is a town known as Ajiyah in which are markets, caravanserais [that is secured or protected places - the word used is *maharis*], a Friday mosque, gardens, cultivated areas and much fruit[fulness]…. " (Al-Yaqoubi 1892, pp.343-344, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 5). The location of Ajiyah is not known, but appears to have been on the coast near Taucheira.

The description by Al-Idrisi talks about a place which seems not to have been destroyed, obliterated, by the victorious armies, but rather to have come to terms, transitioning into the Arab rule, with the population being substantially the same. There is evidence, which I have mentioned already (1.5.3), that there was considerable tension between Coptic Berbers and Orthodox Byzantines before the Arab invasion, and this may very well have assisted the coming to terms with the Muslim Arabs.

For the next mention of Taucheira in the accounts of travellers, we have to wait until the 18th century. James Bruce in 1766 was the first British traveller to visit the city and make notes about it, but in his notes he confused Tolmeitha (Ptolemais) and Taucheira. He mentioned that the walls and gates of Tolmeitha were still standing and full of inscriptions. This description corresponds in fact to Taucheira not to Ptolemais,

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[19] The Arabic word which is translated here by 'little irrigation systems' seems to be a collective noun referring to the ensemble of arrangements surrounding a well, for raising and distributing the water: camel, bucket, hydraulic wheel. The word can possibly also refer to cognate kinds of construction, thus: mill, public fountain, etc.

by the testimony of Della Cella, who visited the two cities in 1817 (Elhadder 1997, p.118, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 6).

Della Cella was the first of many 19th – early 20th century visitors with serious interests in recording (and sometimes disordering) the archaeological remains. He was the first to provide valuable information about the city of Tocra and to correlate it with the place described by Herodotus, Strabo, and Ptolemy. He described the remains of the walls of the city and its inscriptions, and also the gymnasium, and identified a building he believed to be a temple of Bacchus (Cella 1919, pp.198-200).

Another important reference to Taucheira is contained in the work by the Beechey brothers who visited the city in 1822 (Beechey 1828). They attempted the first systematic description of the architecture of the city in chapters 12 and 13 of their book. In chapter 12, they described the location and the topography and provided important historical information about Tocra, especially in the Christian period. In Chapter 13 they concentrated on the remains of the city and analysed it archaeologically (Beechey 1828, pp.352-355 & pp.367-376).

The French traveller Pacho visited in 1825, and the information he gave about the city remains of some interest, but it is considered little more than a rather inaccurate repetition of what the Beechey brothers had already written (Pacho 1827, p.335)

Perhaps the first archaeological excavations, although unstratigraphic, were carried out in Taucheira by De Bourville when he was the consul of France in Benghazi between 1848 and 1849. He worked in the necropolis of the city, and he investigated a number of burials. He also uncovered a house and its decoration, and some clay statues. Unfortunately, these excavations were not stratigraphic, but mostly looking for mosaics and statues, while they removed with no recording the later phases of

occupation (Elhadder 1997, pp.126-127, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 7).

In 1852 the traveller James Hamilton visited Taucheira and stayed there three days, leaving us a description of the ruins of the city together with some analysis of its fortifications (Hamilton 1856, pp.146-151). The travellers Smith and Porcher visited it in 1861, and stayed in the city for two days. They left a brief account of its history and described its archaeological remains, particularly walls, tombs, and inscriptions (Smith and Porcher1864, p.128).

The British deputy consul in Benghazi, G. Dennis, visited Taucheira in 1865, and made a general survey of individual and collective graves. In 1910, Federico Halbherr, the head of the Italian mission in Crete, visited the museum and made what is considered the first archaeological report on the city, in the 20th century (Elhadder 1997, pp.130-131 & p.138, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 8).

2.1.3 Development of archaeological investigation

Fuaad Bentaher undertook short seasons of excavation in the city between 1985 and 1992, as part of the training programme for undergraduate students in Archaeology at Garyunis (Benghazi) University. He concentrated on uncovering remains from late antiquity and the early medieval period; whereas T. Suleiman, who had worked with students on the city from 1974 to 1983, had concentrated on earlier remains, from Greek period, and published three volumes on what he concluded was the agora of the city, in 1986.[20] The six buildings excavated by Bentaher produced abundant material from pre-Islamic periods, and some evidence for the medieval remains. The Islamic remains demonstrate clearly that the city continued to be occupied after the

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[20] This may or may not be correct, since later evidence of artisanal activity on the 'agora' site seems to weigh against its use earlier as a formal agora (Buzaian 2000, p.99).

Arab expansion, but in the buildings examined only relatively limited and minor modifications and additions are to be dated to the post-Byzantine period (Bentaher 1994, p.231, 234, 236; Buzaian 2000). It is worth noting that excavation of earlier phases of the buildings in the city seem to show that no kind of mud-brick construction was used, but that all was then of stone.

2.1.4. Archaeological evidence

The city wall of Taucheira is its most impressive remaining construction. It dates from the Hellenistic period, and was strengthened and modified for the last time for the final resistance of the Byzantine rulers to the invading Arab armies in the middle of the 7th century. A certain quantity of early Islamic remains has been discovered relatively recently, from about 1985 onwards. There has been no evidence of substantial new buildings built after the Arab conquest, but rather there is evidence that the city continued to be occupied with poor housing and production activities, as many other classical and Byzantine cities in North Africa (Bentaher 1995, p.235; Buzaian 2000, p.72).

The archaeological evidence related to the Greek phase of the city is very limited, the Byzantine presence being more imposing. The settlement is surrounded by city walls, which are over 2 km long the complex is believed to have been built already in the Hellenistic period, but it was then fortified again in the Byzantine period, with the construction of 31 square towers and the proteichisma. This latter is an extra mural outer defence, which develops parallel to the walls, 2m wide and it is entirely built with reused stones (Kenrick 2013, p.55). Probably after the Byzantine conquest the city continued to live surrounded by the city walls for protection. On the occasion of the setting of the last defensive stronghold by the Byzantines at the time of the Arab expansion, the proteichisma was built, together with an internal fort which developed

along the cardo maximus. This structure was built in haste, with no foundation and reusing stones from the city. Due to the quality of construction it is however difficult to understand whether the complex has ever served as a fort, or was rather a wall limiting an inhabited sector of the city to provide further security inside the city walls. Churches were also built and excavated from 5th century onwards and the so-called palace, was probably part of the episcopal group. The former Gymnasium of the city was transformed in the Byzantine period into a bath complex and has shown evidence of occupation in the Islamic period, with the presence of recorded graffiti, which have now disappeared.[21] It is significant to note that the Byzantine bath complex is closely located to the fort, and in both structures there is evidence of an early Islamic occupation, showing that probably this area continued to be occupied after the Arab conquest.

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[21] This is unfortunately a rather common habit, for instance also in Sabratha a large number of early Islamic Graffiti in the Basilica I were recorded, but subsequently removed by restorations.
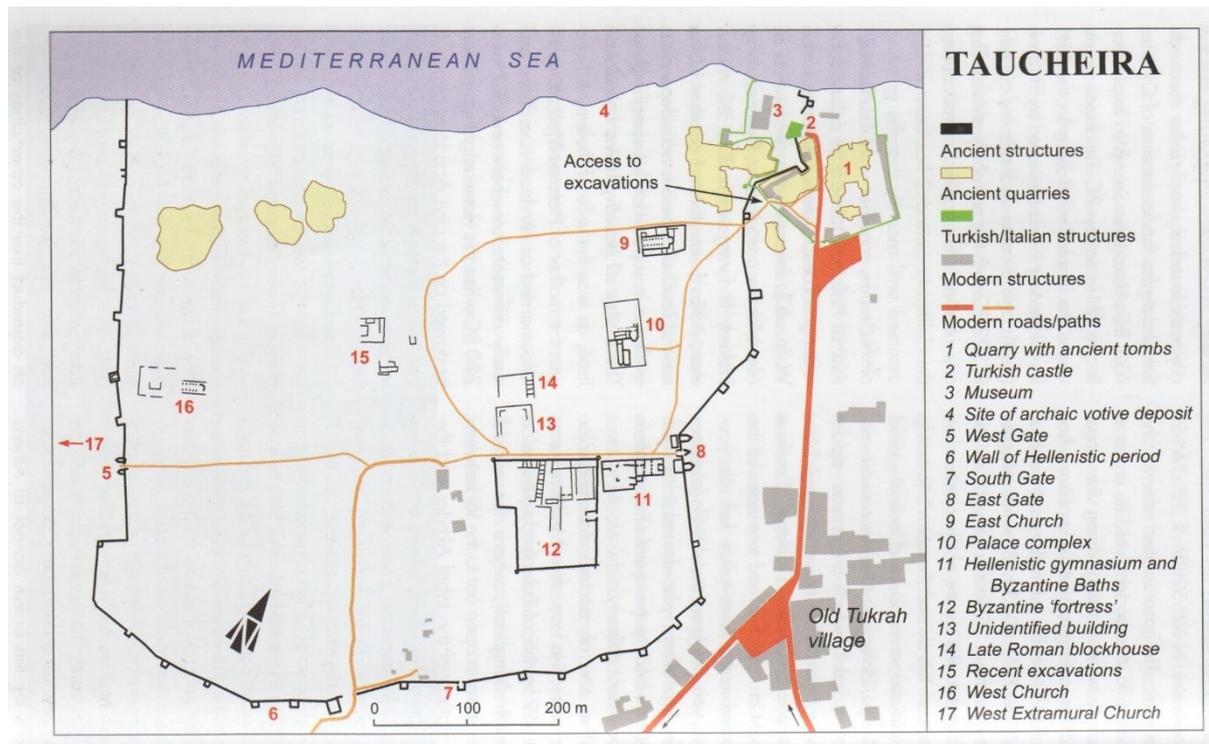
Fig. 3 Taucheria plan of the site (after Kenrick 2013, p.50, Fig. 30)

2.1.4.1 Forts

The fortress, which is one of the largest buildings discovered in the city of Taucheira, occupies an area of about 10625m^2. It is located to the west of the eastern gate and is separated from it only by the gymnasium with its Byzantine baths overlooking the street of the decumanus. The fortress was mentioned by the Beechey brothers in the early 19th century (Beechey 1828, p.367). Also, Hamilton described it as a quadrilateral building and concluded that it had been a military post, after comparing it with the fortress of Anastasius in the city of Tolmeitha (Hamilton 1856, p.148). The first detailed work on this fortress was during the excavations conducted under the supervision of the city by Goodchild in the period 1962-1965. These excavations exhibited chiefly the walls of the fort and its subdivisions, emphasising the archaeological features without paying any great attention to the sequencing of the finds on the site. Barry Jones in 1969 completed the excavation work on the fortress,

opening several trenches (for what is written here in the rest of this section, see Jones 1983; Jones 1984; Jones 1985). The most important of these were the five small trenches that showed the structure to be L-shaped rather than rectangular, and to lie further south than the main excavated area. The principal features of interest were the two southern corners. The trench at the South Tower provided good information about the tower; and the work of Ali Latrk and Stoke added a good deal to the understanding of the building (Elhadder, Book under publication, p.26, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 9).

The Byzantine fortress (The Byzantine-Islamic fort) at Taucheira was constructed in haste (see 2.1.1), as many of the Byzantine structures it was built with reused material, but in this case the complex is also built without the presence of any foundation (Jones 1985, p.37) (See Fig. 4 A & B). The later construction is also proved by the fact that the south-eastern corner the walls of the fort abutting against the tower (Jones 1985, p.39).

The fortress was built with parts simply in mudbrick, with no real foundations. The suggestion already made by Goodchild in 1967 was that this stronghold was constructed under the immediate threat of the Arab invasion of the seventh century (Goodchild 1967, p.121). This interpretation however leaves some elements for discussion. There is to date no recorded mudbrick construction built in the Byzantine period, and the use of mudbrick for a Byzantine fortification would be a unique example in the whole of North Africa. It is however currently impossible to evaluate on what basis this interpretation has been elaborated. These mudbrick walls, rather than being part of the fortification (Jones 1985, p.37), were probably more likely structures (further

partitions?) in connection with an early Islamic occupation, as it has been for instance recorded in Carthage in the sector of the circular harbour[22].
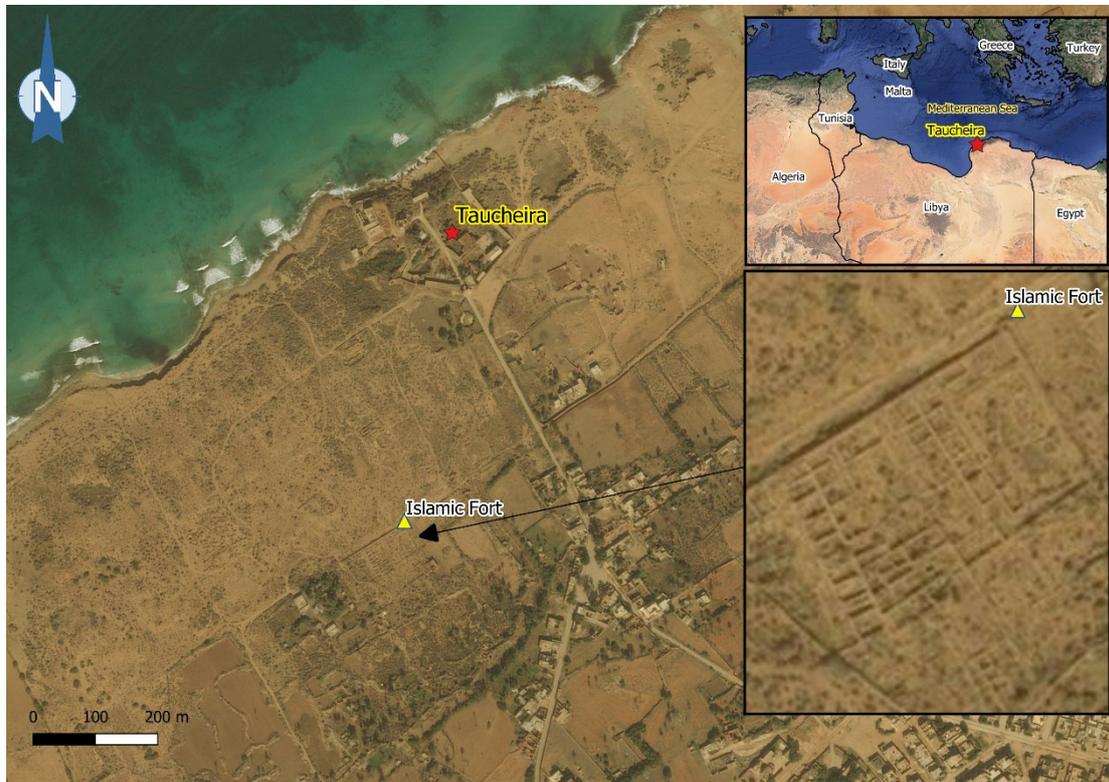

Fig. 4A Aerial View of the Byzantine fortresses (The Byzantine-Islamic fort) Taucheira (by Author elaborated from Google Earth).

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[22] Hurst 1978

West Courtyard

East Courtyard

Chaple

UNEXCAVATED

Plan of Byzantine Fortress

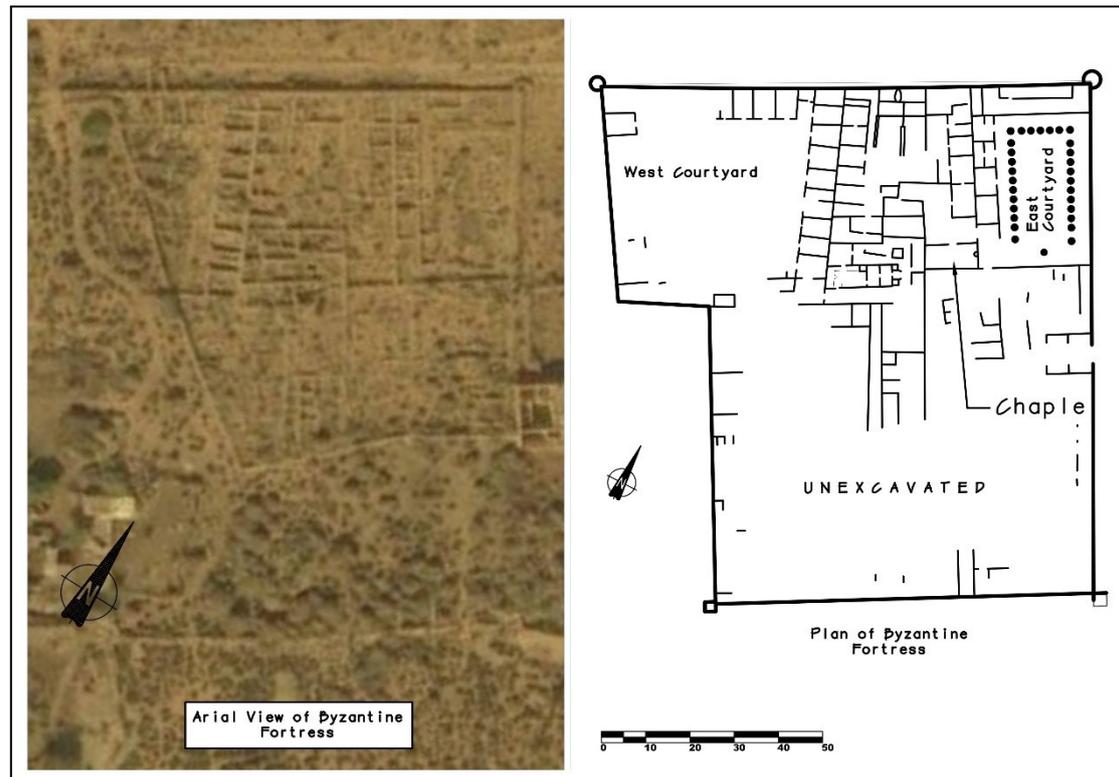0 10 20 30 40 50

Arial View of Byzantine Fortress

Fig. 4B Aerial View of the Byzantine fortresses (The Byzantine-Islamic fort) Taucheira (by Author elaborated from Google Earth).

In terms of general description, the large fortress extends from the north-west to the south-east a distance of 119m, and extends between 100-110m from the north-east to the south-west. It is not equilateral. Its general shape is closer to the Roman Letter L. It can be accessed from a wide entrance in the middle of the north-eastern rib, and it seems to have had an entrance overlooking the decumanus which was later closed. The south-eastern rib is characterized by rectangular towers dating from the origin of the building, and on the north-western side the two round towers are additions that clearly were added to the fort at a later time, probably after the Islamic conquest of the city. This is highlighted by the way in which the construction deliberately does not follow the line of the original wall of the building. Why this change to the original line of the wall was made is something that has to be investigated further, rather than being covertly presented as incompetence (See Fig. 5).
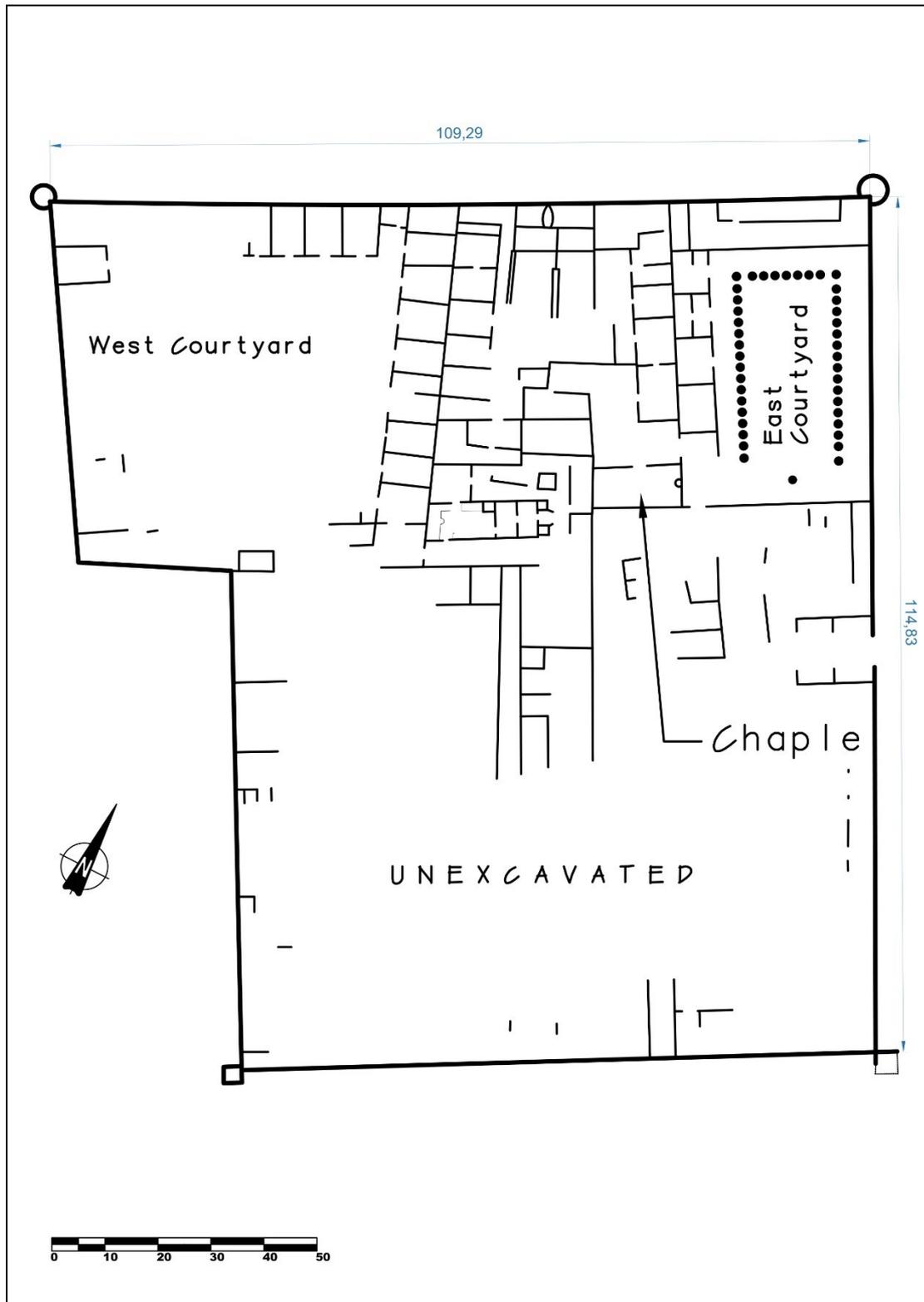
60

West Courtyard

East Courtyard

Chaple

UNEXCAVATED

109,29

114,83

0 10 20 30 40 50

Fig. 5 Plan of the Byzantine fortresses Taucheira redrawing by Enas Bubtana (after Kenrick 2013, p.72, Fig. 37)

When looking at the internal divisions of the fortress, it can be seen that the centre of the whole building is in the north-west of the fort. Over against this, the south-east of the building can be divided into three sections or courtyards. The north-eastern courtyard, which is a rectangular open square surrounded by a canopy on all four sides, was supported by a group of stone columns, varying in number between one gallery and another, and different in their capitals: Ionian, Dorian and Corinthian. These galleries were covered with sandstone stone slabs of various sizes. It seems that this courtyard was a place for some service-oriented activities that are not easy to comment on. The most important hall in this courtyard was clearly the south-western gallery, which was surrounded by four adjacent rooms. This may have had a function related to the construction, with official receptions and administrative work carried out there.

The south-western courtyard, which is larger than the previous one and is as yet not completely excavated, exhibits in general not so much architectural detail. It was surrounded by a gallery on wooden rather than stone supports, unlike the first courtyard, as still visible rectangular holes demonstrate. The courtyard is overlooked from the north-east, south-east and north-west by a row of small rooms. The north-eastern group is the best and most complete by comparison with the rooms on the other two sides. The number of rooms is nine, and they are separated from each other and overlook the north-eastern gallery. It seems that this courtyard and the rooms overlooking it served as barracks for the soldiers, and it seems that the spacious courtyard and the rooms overlooking that had been used for cavalry horses and soldiers also, especially since there was a main entrance overlooking it, closed later, but probably used for the movement of soldiers (Jones 1983, p.117) from the fortress.

The middle courtyard was overlooked by a group of rooms on all four sides; but the many divisions and modifications and additions made to this courtyard later mean that it is difficult to imagine the original arrangement. The most important rooms seem to have included a chapel (See Fig. 5); and a rectangular bathroom which is a miniature of the Byzantine baths in Taucheira. The main parts of the bathroom are the dressing room and cold, warm, and hot rooms for bathing. The hot room is raised on stone bases to allow the passage of air below its floor. This room has been provided with two tubs or two baths. Each bathtub is covered with a special layer of limestone. The walls of the bathtubs are strikingly smooth. These arrangements in the middle courtyard were plainly for the fortress commander and his immediate entourage. The Muslims also used this fort after settling in the defeated city and made a lot of modifications and divisions in the original rooms and added the two alternating towers. The building seems to have been in use until the 10th century and perhaps even after that time. An Islamic lamp of green porcelain (see 2.1.4.2) dating back to that period inside building A or perhaps a tower in the decumanus, adjoining the north-western wall of the fortress, are evidence for this later use.

2.1.4.2 Pottery

The pottery and lamps found in the later ground levels of the buildings are dated to the Byzantine and early Islamic period; there seems no reason to suppose that there was any great interruption to life in the city at the usual domestic level after the invasion (Bentaher 1994, p.234).[23] The overall sequence of pottery remains extends from the Hellenistic through to the Islamic occupation of the 7th century, with the majority of the

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[23] It is interesting to note that a kind of standardised late-Roman cooking ware was in use in many Cyrenaican sites from about the 6th century right up until the 12th century (Buzaian 2000, p.91, 100).

remains dating from the 2nd century (Buzaian 2000, pp.86-87). The green glaze lamp of the 10th century, however, with its spout missing, found in the fortress of Taucheira confirms a continuity of occupation (Jones 1985, p.39) The lamp is in the stores office in Taucheira (Toc 69-5-2). It is an Arabic, green-glazed lamp of polished pottery, length 8cm, diameter 6cm, the oil nozzle is 2.3cm (broken), height of the handle 4.4cm and height of the body 2.9cm, nose diameter 2.9cm (See Fig. 6).

Fig. 6 The green-glazed lamp found in the Byzantine fortress (photo by Author).

The lamp is plated from the base but it is not smooth. The dating of the lamp is by comparison with other lamps discovered in the city of Medina Sultan (6.4.3). When we compare this single lamp with the several lamps of a similar kind found at Medina Sultan (Fehérvári 2002, p.84), we can say with some confidence that green-glazed lamps of this kind were in common use in Taucheira in the 10th century, just as they were in Medina Sultan.

2.1.4.3 Coins

Two early Islamic copper coins were discovered by Fuaad Bentaher in the late 1980s in Room II of Building A of the site, one of them overstruck on a Byzantine or Sassanian coin. Both of the coins have plainly Islamic formulae stamped on them: 'there is no God except Allah alone' and 'Mohammed is the messenger of Allah' (Bentaher 1994, pp.234-235; Buzaian 2000, pp.75, 95): "This kind of copper coin or fals... was of unknown date and mint, and based on a Byzantine type. The Islamic style for copper coins was perhaps initiated after the reform of the Umayyad gold dinar(74AH/696CE-77AH/699CE), and the[se] two Tocra coins are probably related to the anonymous Umayyad fals whose date has not been closely established. The undated types were presumably issued some time before the earliest dated ones, which were minted at Damascus in 87AH/709CE (Broome 1985, pp.4-18, nos. 5-18; Buzaian 2000, p.95)".

2.1.4.4 Inscriptions

The inscriptions presented here from the archive of the Dept. of Antiquities, Taucheira have all been re-examined, drawn and read and the results of this work is here proposed. Where only photographs are presented and not drawings, it is because the condition of the stone made detailed drawing impossible.

Inscription 1

A presentation of the inscription:

This headstone was found in the outskirts of Taucheira, and is currently preserved in the stores in Taucheira. The gravestone is written in a simple Kufic script without diacritic signs incised on a semi-rectangular piece of limestone measuring 47.5 cm ×

32 cm × 11 cm. The gravestone has eight lines of lettering. There is no name of the dead person but we can read the date of his death. That, in fact, the burial of a man is recorded here, we see from the masculine pronoun (See Fig. 7). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1. [Bism Allah] the compassionate

2.……………[light of the skies]

3. and of the earth, [light of the grave]

4. He is witnessing .. [that there is no Allah but Allah he died.]..

5. [Seven forty] He died as he testified

6. ……there is no Allah but Allah

7. he has no associte and [that Muhammad is]

8. the Messenger of Allah [Pray [sic] of Allah be upon him].

.1 [بسم اللـه] الرحمن

.2 الرحيم [يانور السمو]

.3 . ات والارض [نور قبر..........]

.4 هو يشهد ..[ان لا اله الا الله توفي سنه ..]

.5 سبعة واربعـــــــ[ين....توفي وهو يشهد ان....]

.6..............الا اله الا الله

.7 وحده لا شريك له [وان محمداً]

.8 رسول اللـه [صل [كذا] اللـه عليه وسلم] .

Notes on the inscription:

The inscription is from the first century AH 7th century CE and dates to 47AH/669CE, twenty-three years after the Arab conquest; this means this inscription is *the oldest yet found in Cyrenaica*. The shape of the inscription is irregular, so the words of the text seem unclear at first sight. The engraver lacked experience and skill. He did not organize the lines well, and the text is not well planned and distributed on the stone so that the best use may be made of the space.
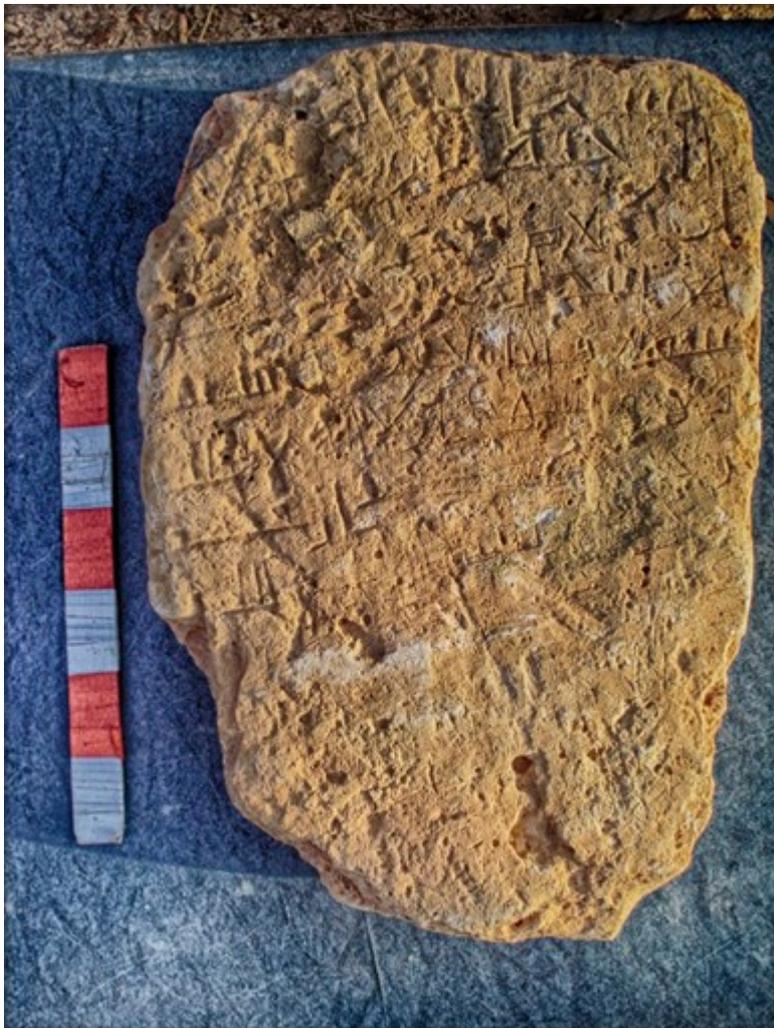

Fig. 7 Inscription 1 (photo from the archive of the Dept. of Antiquities, Taucheira).

Inscription 2

A presentation of the inscription:

This headstone was found in the outskirts of the city, and is currently preserved in the stores in Taucheira. The gravestone is written in a simple Kufic script without diacritic signs incised on a semi-square piece of sandstone, measuring 30cm × 35cm × 24cm. The gravestone has six lines of lettering. There is no name of the dead person or any date of death (See Fig. 8 A). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1 .[I bear witness that there is no Allah only Allah]

2.[but] Allah alone with no partner]

3 ..and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah

4.He Who hath sent [.... His Messenger]...

5.with guidance[sic] and the Religion of Truth, to proclaim it

6.[over all religion, even though the Pagans may detest (it)].

1. [اشهد ان لا اله الا الله]

2. [له] ...وحده لا شريك

3. . وان محمد عبده .....

4.ورسوله [ارسله......]

5. بالهدا [كذا] ودين الحق ليظهره

6 . [على الدين كله ولو كره الكافرون]

Notes on the inscription:

The date of the gravestone is somewhere within the first two centuries of the Islamic settlement of Cyrenaica (7th-8th centuries CE). The chronology is based on the style of writing (simple Kufic), which can be compared with an inscription found on a tombstone preserved in the stores in Cyrene. The Cyrene gravestone is dated to154AH/776CE (Bubtana 2007, p.27, Pl.1) whose similarity to this inscription is strikingly evident in the style of writing in the following letters:

Dal(),Alha(),,Mim(), Alssa (), and

alllam 'alf ()(See Fig. 8 B). The writing represents verse 33 of Surah Al-Tawbah in the Quran.

{ هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَى وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ }

Fig. 8A Inscription 2 (Photo from the archive of the Dept. of Antiquities , Taucheira).
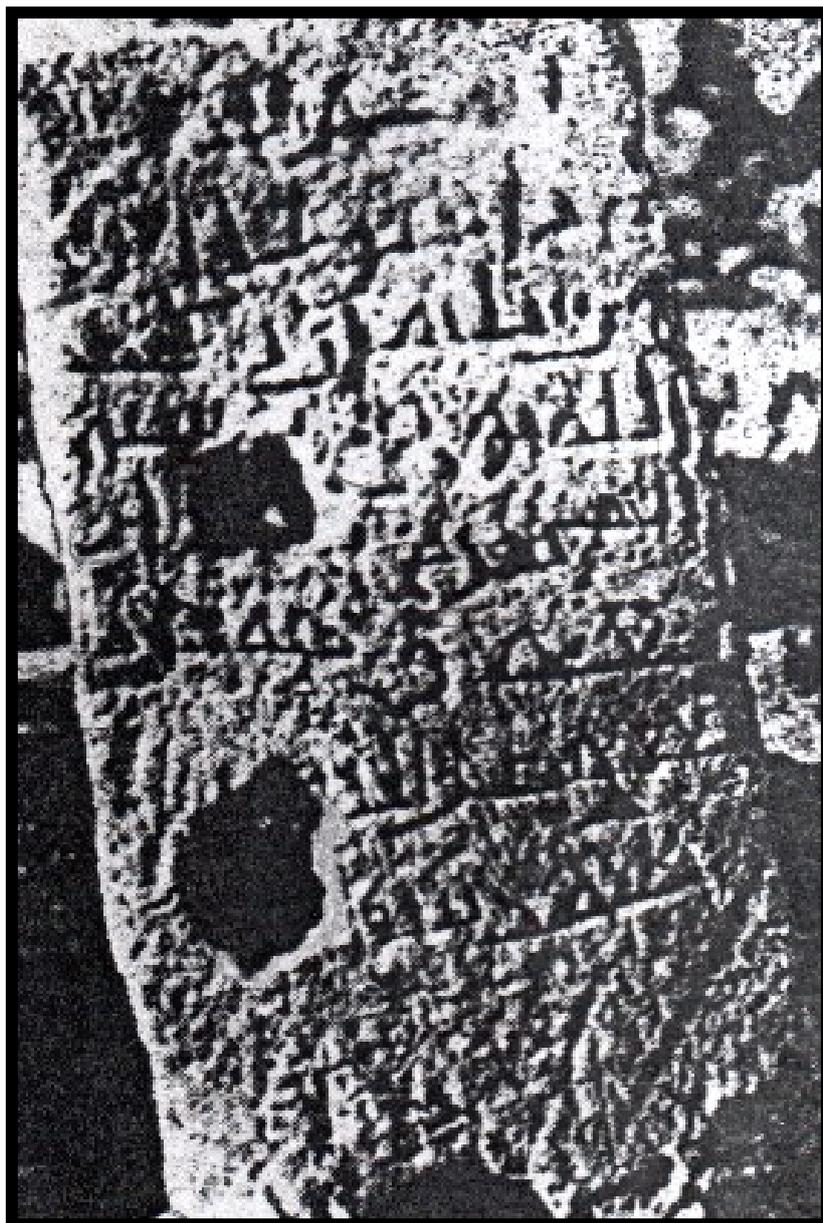
Fig. 8B Inscription 2 (after Bubtana 2007, p.27, Pl.1).

Inscription 3

A piece of rectangular limestone was found in the outskirts of the city, and is currently preserved in the stores in Taucheira. It is written in a simple Kufic script without diacritic signs incised on a piece of limestone, measuring 39cm × 22cm × 11cm. The inscription has seven lines of lettering (See Fig. 9). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1. [Bism Allah] the

2. Most Gracious the Most Merciful

3. Enter ye here

4. in peace

5. and security

6. And We shall remove

7. from their hearts

8. any lurking sense of injury.

1. بسم الله الر

2.حمن الرحيم

3.ادخلوها

4.بسلام

5. امينين

6.ونزعنا ما في

7.صدورهم

8.من غل......

Notes on the inscription:

The inscription contains no date, but it can nevertheless be confidently dated since it uses the simple Kufic script which is commonly found in Cyrenaica inscriptions in securely dated examples. For instance, the headstone dated to 154AH/776CE which we mention in inscription 2 the similarity with it is strikingly evident in the style of writing in the following letters: Dal ( ),Alha(/),Alra(/) ,Waw (/),Mim (/ /) and the word Allah. We also note in this inscription that the writer was influenced by the Nabatean style[24], especially in the division of words and their distribution on two lines, as in the word Rahman (الرحمن) divided between the first and second lines the word Adkhuluha (ادخلوها) divided between the third and fourth lines. The writing represents verse 47-46 of Surah Al-Hijr in the Quran.

$$\{ \text{ادْخُلُوهَا بِسَلَامٍ آمِنِينَ * وَنَزَعْنَا مَا فِي صُدُورِهِم مِّنْ غِلٍّ}\}$$

The text used for the inscription on the stone suggests that it may have been placed on a building. This particular verse is usually found at the entrances to houses or inside mosques. The easiest speculation here is that this inscription was placed at the entrance to a mosque in Taucheira, and that the body of Muslim believers used this verse at the entrance to their mosque as an invitation, or a gesture of reconciliation, towards the Coptic Berber believers they were surrounded by, being both in a certain way in a stronger 'official' position than their Berber neighbours and also outnumbered by them.

---

[24] The Nabatean style was the first Arabic style of writing (before Kufic),

Fig. 9 Inscription 3 (Photo from the archive of the Dept. of Antiquities , Taucheira)

Inscription 4

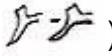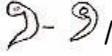There is another inscription originally from inside the Byzantine baths, which was found in the Islamic Byzantine fortress. It is engraved on a piece of stone found in the general pile of gymnasium stones. It has inscriptions in Arabic written in a simple Kufic script. The profession of faith can be dated, from the style, to the 7th /8th centuries (See Fig. 10).

Fig. 10 Inscription 4 (Photo by Author)

The four inscriptions presented here can be the subject of very cautious conjecture. If it is remembered that Tocra was a Berber city, then the presence there (inscription 1) of the oldest Arabic inscription yet found in Cyrenaica might be significant. Taken together with the fact that inscriptions 1, 2, and 3 were all found on the outskirts of the

city, however we know very little about their finding, and the stone could have been removed and reused somewhere else at a later date.

2.1.5. Conclusions and recommendations

The knowledge of the pre-Byzantine city is very limited and it does not allows any topographical consideration on a large scale; it is however possible to single out a few points.

First of all, the development of the city of Taucheira in the Byzantine period Is very typically characterised by the reinforcement of the city wall as well as the construction of a fort in a reduced space within the former city. Unfortunately, the data available are too limited to fully understand the function of the different buildings and structures inside the possible fort. It is very probable that the mud brick structures in the fort are probably of early Islamic period. The presence of one 10th century lamp is not sufficient to indicate with certainty a long-term occupation, but this presence, in association with the numerous inscriptions, suggests that the site, as many cities in North Africa, was occupied at least until the 10th century after the Arab conquest. The evidence of Islamic structures in and around the fort indicates a continuity of occupation of the structure, also the nearby Byzantine bath probably continued to be in use (Kenrick 2013, p.60) . The fact that this complex continued to be occupied after the Arab conquest suggests that the settlement continued to be centred in the old city. The presence of early Islamic structures just outside of the walls of the fort, indicates that the structures lost their defensive function, if they ever had it, and also that as in many cases in the early Islamic period, constructions now encroached over former main roads of the city, changing substantially the original layout of the city. Finally, the presence of the inscription indicating a mosque, prove that only a very limited part of

the early Islamic city has been uncovered and at present it is not possible to make any proposal on its location.

2.2. Tolmeitha

2.2.1. Geography and history

Tolmeitha was a Greek foundation probably dating back to the 7th century BCE. The importance of the settlement has been connected with its function as harbour city of the nearby Barqa. The major development of the city occurred in the 4th century BCE, which also saw the construction of the city walls. Unfortunately understanding the full extent of the circuit wall is very complicated due to major spoliation which occurred in the settlement in the later periods of occupation. It is possible that the city walls were also extended to the sea front, but the progressive expansion of the coastal line has covered part of the sea front of the old city (Kenrick 2013, pp.67-106) (See Fig. 11).
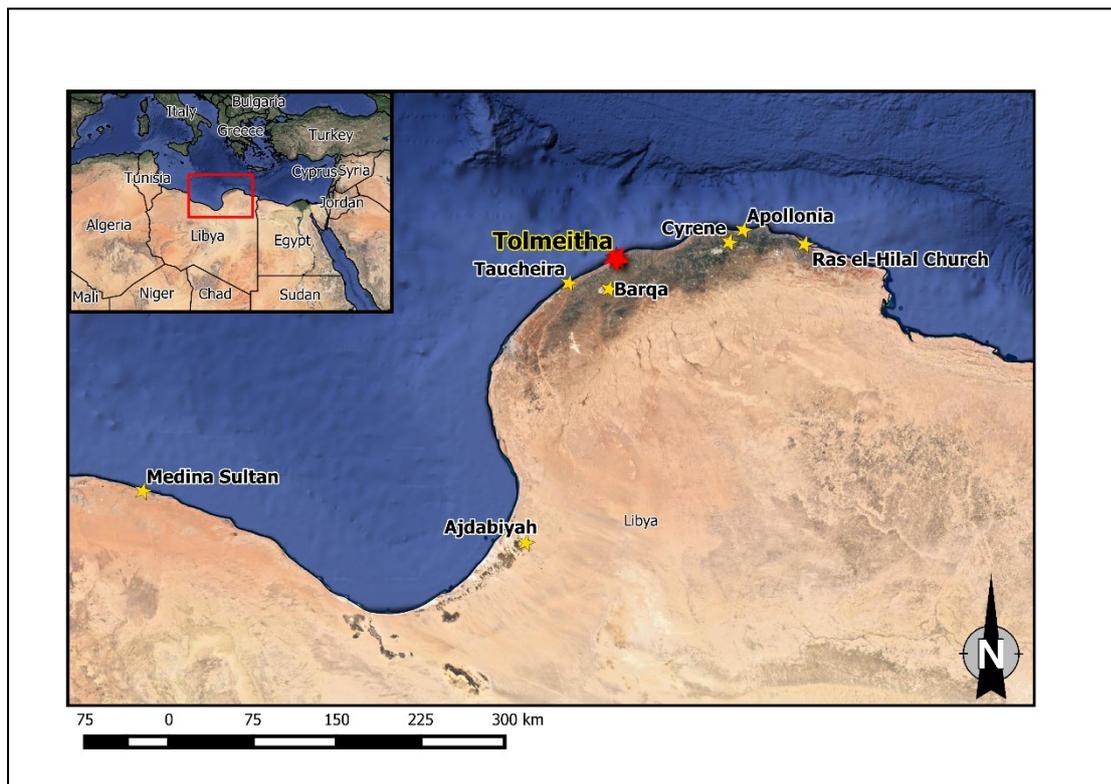

Fig. 11 Close-up map of Tolmeitha (by Author elaborated from Google Earth).

Tolmeitha (Ptolemais) was a flourishing city still in the Roman period, and was at its peak of importance as the capital of the Cyrenaica Pentapolis (Libya Superior) in the

4th century CE. In the 5th century, its bishop was the famous letter writer Synesius, who describes in his correspondence the inexorable decline of the city under increasing pressure from tribal raiding parties coming from the interior, and perhaps as a long-term consequence of the serious earthquake of 365CE. In the middle of the 5th century the city ceased to be the provincial capital, and its long city wall was partly demolished to make way for a more defensible arrangement of manned blockhouses. The importance of the city in the Byzantine period, is well attested, by the presence of several large structures, including a Byzantine palace and two fortified structures within the cities.

Unfortunately, most of the excavations of the different monuments have been partial, non-stratigraphic or never published, leaving the data extremely difficult to interpret and to fully analyse. The data on the later period of occupation are very scanty and limited. It is possible to think that the city of Ptolemais continued to play a significant role after the Arab conquest, as it was the harbour of the city of Barqa. After the Islamic conquest Barqa became the head of a large province of the same name. However, it also needs to be taken into account that drawing upon evidence of trade and connectivity after the 7th century is very difficult due to the limited knowledge on the pottery productions and the lack of information in the 8th and 9th c. It is not clear how much, if any, of Barqa's trade went by sea during the medieval period. It might be assumed that Barqa's position on the great land route connecting Tunisia with Egypt would have encouraged overland trade, especially in view of the possible difficulties involved in sailing across the Gulf of Surt. Maritime trade was cheaper than overland trade but was not practicable in winter when only overland trade would have connected Tunisia and Egypt. If the maritime trade route was at all important then it would be reasonable to expect a substantial settlement at Ptolemais (Kennet 1991, p.87).

2.2.2. Tolmeitha in the books of travellers and geographers

Al Yaqoubi makes clear the established importance of Barqa, and in doing so he mentions Ptolemais. This is how he describes the city of Barqa, which he visited at the end of the 9th century (278AH/900CE): "between the town of Barqa and the sea is a distance of six miles; on the coast is a town known as Ajiyah in which are markets, caravanserais [that is secured or protected places - the word used is *maharis*], a Friday mosque, gardens, cultivated areas and much fruit[fulness]; there is another port known as Ptolemais where ships sometimes dock. Barqa has two ranges of hills, one of which is known as the east range and the other the west range" (Al-Yaqoubi 1892, p344, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 10).

Al-Idrisi also mentions the port of Tolmeitha, writing in the 12th century. He says: "... and to the Palace of Tolmeitha, a good fortress surrounded by a wall of stones along the length of ten miles.... crowded with people and boats coming from Alexandria, and carrying the goods cotton and linen and bearing honey and tar ...." (Al-Idrisi 1866, p.102, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 11).

Ibn Said also in 1250 says that "the port of Barqa on the sea and on the edge of the jungle ... Tolmeitha a famous village and a palace in which there are Jews under the Khvara Arabs .... also there are vessels carrying sulfur, honey, wheat and other kinds of barley......" (Ibn Said 1840, p.80, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 12).

Abu Al-Fida writing in the early 14th century evidently either in part quotes Ibn Said or a source common to both Ibn Said and himself. He describes the country extending up to the city of Tolmeitha and then says: "Talmitha (Tolmeitha) ... a palace in which there are Jews under the Khvara Arabs .... also there are vessels carrying sulfur,

honey, barley, etc. ... and the Jews were occupying a large tower, the number of Jews at present is more than 200 ... Talmitha (Tolmeitha) is about a month's journey away from Alexandria. And the boats are anchored near the Palace of the Jews and near it also .... the Arabs prepare and sell goods by trade''. (Abu Al-Fida 1957, p.84, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 13).

2.2.3. Development of archaeological investigation

Almost all the archaeological work on Ptolemais so far has been concerned with the rich and varied presence of classical remains. The buildings, both public and private, suggest a wealthy and important city, worth some attempt to make it more defensible in the 5th century at a time of decline. In addition, the presence beneath the large open square at the urban centre, of an enormous complex of cisterns with, it is estimated, storage space for five million litres of water, dating probably from the Hellenistic period, suggests how thorough and confident the investment was in the future of Tolmeitha (Ptolemais).

The continuation of Goodchild's work in the late 1950s (published in Kraeling 1962, pp.82-93) by a further investigation, continuing into 1971, of House G (See Fig. 12) revealed steadily more clearly a systematic reordering of the architectural elements which was much more than "the result of the occupation of a derelict building by squatters" (Gibson 1978, p.7). Data have shown continuity of occupation from the Byzantine into the early Islamic period. House G is reckoned to have been abandoned abruptly in the 4th century CE, perhaps as a result of earthquake and subsequently being re-occupied thereafter and it was rebuilt in the later Byzantine period and under the Muslims. In the late rebuilding it was subdivided into what are described as 'linked units' and industrial activity seems to have taken place there, indicated by possible

olive presses: this is attributed to the Islamic period. Subsequently, at an unknown

date, the building was abandoned (King 1989, p.195).
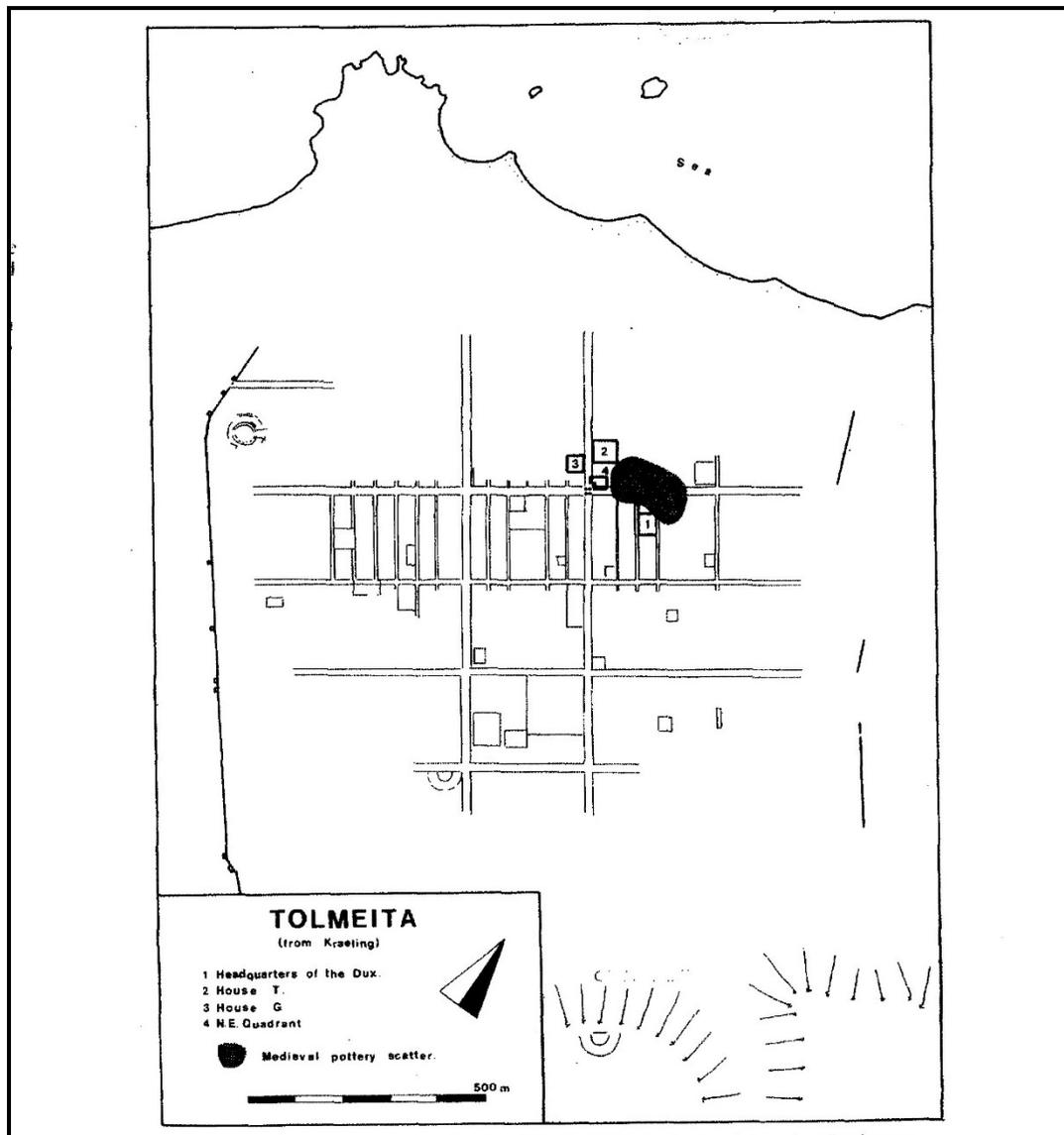
Fig. 12 General plan of Tolmeitha showing the location of House G & the N.E. Quadrant (after (Kennet 1991, p.85)

The house G was located along the major road cutting across the city. The continuity into the Islamic period has been suggested with the important evidence of production and housing (Kennet 1991, p.83). Similar evidence of inhabited nuclei with production activities develops in many North African cities, as for instance in Thuburbo Maius, where an inhabited neighborhood with olive presses develops all around the capitolium of the city (Leone 2007). The area must have been extensively inhabited, and the presence of a second floor building built in mudbrick is suggested (Kenrick 2013, p.77). (See Fig. 13)
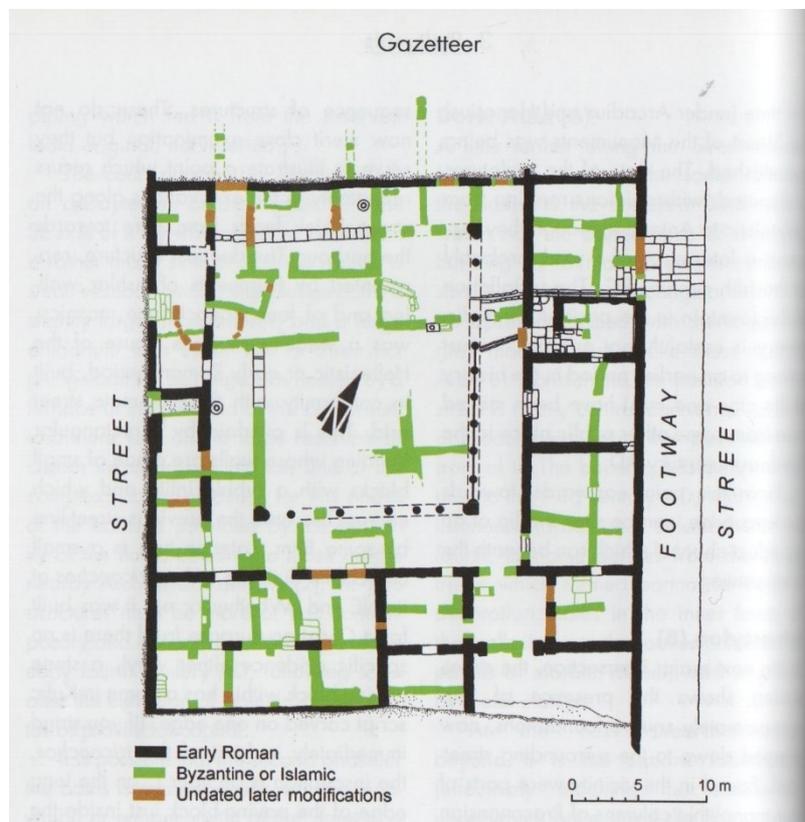
Fig. 13 Tolmeitha plan of House G (after Kenrick 2013, p.76, Fig. 47).

Evidence of later occupation of the nearby house of the triapsidal hall suggests that this sector of the city continued to be occupied in the later period. (See Fig. 14)
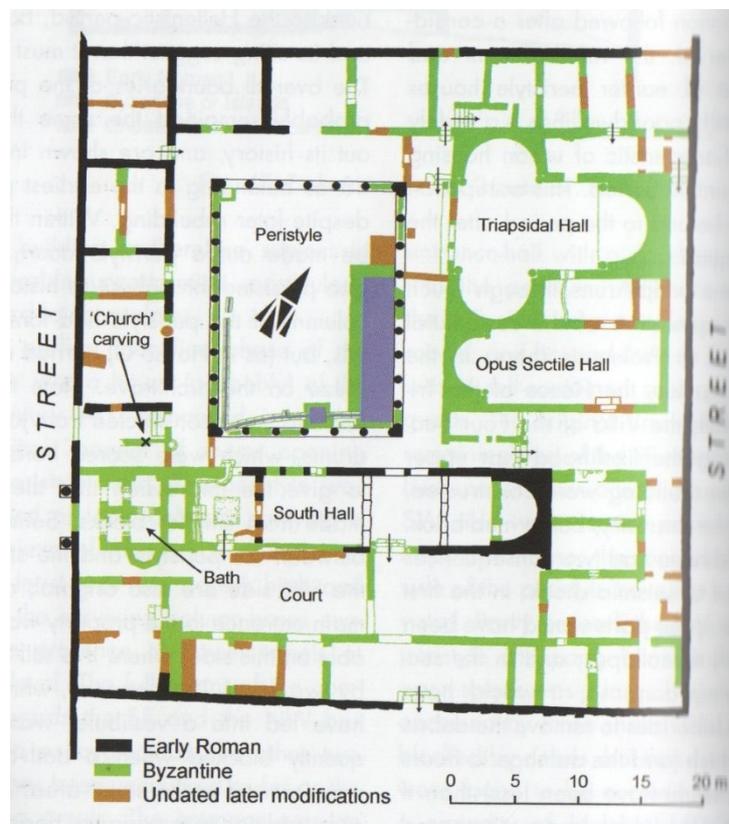
Fig. 14. Tolmeitha: plan of the House of Triapsidal Hall (after Kenrick 2013, p.78, Fig 48.).

In the N.E. Quadrant of the site (See Fig. 12), there is evidence of buildings which continued to be in use in the early Islamic period (Gibson 1978, p.8). Building 3 in the N.E. Quadrant, placed at an angle from the orientation of the classical street, offers evidence of later occupation, which appears to be confirmed by the presence of an early Kufic inscription (Gibson 1978, p.9). This stone, Jastrzebowska comments, is found in a "secondary context" [ie. reused] in the floor of the pavement (Jastrzebowska 2007, p.100). If the inscriptions existed on the stone before its reuse in the floor, it suggests that the stone was placed there in a later period, but we are unable to identify which was its original location.

The archaeological evidence, moreover, suggests that the early Islamic settlement developed in different parts of the city. The west church which is located at the periphery of the urban area, near the city walls, preserves a large number of graffiti on the walls. The function of the church with its graffiti is difficult to define, they appear to be mostly incisions. Sources mentioned a fort in the city, which at the moment has not been identified archaeologically. Unfortunately, the data are still very limited and it is impossible to evaluate the full extent of the development of the city in the early Islamic period, although it is arguable that it was an important centre, given the extension of the excavated buildings.

2.2.4. Archaeological evidence

There is no doubt that the presence of a stone clearly inscribed in Arabic script and clearly part of the basic structure of the building would give us a secure *terminus a quo* for the erection of the building within the Islamic period. However, until I visited the site myself, I was very puzzled to know what an Arabic-inscribed stone was doing in a floor where it could be walked over. We could surely not have to do with a memorial stone, or any kind of profession of religious faith, since such an inscribed object would not have been placed in so 'dishonouring' a position, where it could be walked over by all-comers. It is true that there are Christian examples of such a placing of memorial stones, but this usually in order to emphasise the humility before all-comers of the buried person. This seems a distinctively Christian and not Muslim attitude on the part of a believer, since the Muslim faithful humble themselves only to Allah.

The placing of the stone, then, needed explanation. In the event, I found nothing in the place where Gibson had suggested it was; but there was a stone, inscribed with a name, and a single word following, apparently very low down in a wall in the house immediately adjacent to Building 3, that is House G. In an area fairly much tumbled

and disordered, the stone, now lying on its side as though forming part of a wall where it joined the floor, seemed to bear a personal identification and perhaps the beginning of a profession of faith (See Fig. 15):

(Omar ibn Said...? witnesses.....)

(عمرو بن سعيد يشهد.......)

Fig. 15 The Kufic inscription in House G (Photo by Author).

Certainly this fragmentary Arabic-inscribed stone was being used in a 'secondary context' by Muslim builders, so long as it could not have been walked over. If it was being re-used in the precise position in which the present writer saw it in House G (and the placing of it so low down in the structure, in so unemphatic, though not dishonourable, a position, would suggest that this is the case), then the stone had already had an appreciable life in another building context before it came to rest in House G. If it had been indeed, however, a burial place where the inscribed stone began life, it is difficult to imagine what motives could have led to its removal and re-use.

Another important evidence bearing inscriptions is the west church. The graffiti-laden walls covered with Arabic inscription of the west church in the town could suggest that

the reason why there was no separate and independently built mosque was that the Christian faith of the one evidently satisfactory religious building in the town could be very easily and comfortably accommodated by the newcomers.

2.2.4.1. Pottery

It is puzzling, in view of the evidence cited above (see 2.2.2) about 'commercial activity', and in view of the fact that Ptolemais is frequently mentioned by the medieval Arabic travellers and geographers, that so little medieval material has so far been discovered on the site. "Pottery and other evidence so far recovered is meagre and not easily used for evidence of strong continuing medieval occupation", though such pottery evidence as there is suggests Islamic occupation "from at least the late tenth to the early thirteenth century" (Kennet 1991, pp.84-86). This evidence is extremely important as it suggests that the city and its harbour continued to maintain the important role of a commercial outpost.

2.2.4.2. Inscriptions

The writer recorded these inscriptions when visiting the church in Ptolemais. The walls of the church are covered with many Arabic inscriptions in a simple Kufic script inside and outside the church. They are in a very bad condition because of the proximity of the church to the sea; most of the inscriptions, especially on the outside walls of the church, have deteriorated and started to disappear. The writer could find only some words such as the names that still exist. This is, as we said because of its proximity to the sea, for the inscriptions that are inside the church are, better than the outside. All the inscriptions are written at the entrance of the church and on the eastern wall of the central apse, which were a bit clearer. There are more than 30 inscriptions inside the church, on the apse and also inscriptions on the outer walls of the church. Here were

recorded professions of faith, prayers for forgiveness, religious invocations or confessions. Also there are some personal names, such as the name Yazid, Omar and the word Dayr (meaning originally 'monastery'). The writer found it difficult to register most of these inscriptions because they are placed high on the walls. It is necessary to climb to the top for photography and documentation. The choice of examples has sometimes been dictated by relative ease of access. The inscriptions presented here have all been examined and drawn by the author. In some cases, the state of preservation of the stones did not allow the drawing.

Indeed, some of what is written on the wall of the church is much better described as inscription than graffiti. Besides the Christian presence on the wall: the crosses of consecration, stray Greek and Latin letters, perhaps holes in a horizontal line across the curved surface at about altar height to hold relics; the Arab presence is marked by the emphatic use of the 'allahumma', which is a form of turning to God in use by the Arabs both before and after the coming of the Muslim faith (Sharon 1997, p.371), and which might even perhaps be a form of turning to God in prayer that could be used by an Arabic-speaking Christian. It does not perhaps seem fanciful to suggest that the Arab presence allows for the generalised Arabic as well as for the Islamic and that we might find in this detail of the writing on the church wall a capaciousness of credal possibility. What remains here of the Christian church has been used and re-used as a prayer place; perhaps, indeed, the reason for the absence of evident fortified buildings in the town is because the church was also, at times, used as a fort (See Fig. 16).

Fig. 16 The General aerial view for the location of the west church in Tolmeitha (by Author elaborated from Google Earth).

This church has had a long life, and a life that continued after the Arab invasion without significant erasure of its past use. It may perhaps stand as an icon for the kind of complexity of the situation in Cyrenaica after the Arab invasion, which has been argued for so far in this thesis. There is a final puzzle about the wall. The word *mamar* in Arabic script occurs frequently and almost it seems at random. The word means something like 'entry', and by an Arabic speaker it cannot easily be taken metaphorically. Is it perhaps some kind of welcoming word directed to whoever comes to the wall? The puzzle remains. A selection of inscriptions follows here.

<u>Inscription 1</u>

A block of stone is present at the entrance to the church. It is engraved in simple Kufic script. It consists of one line of inscription and is a part of Surat Al-Ikhlas. The rest of the writing is unclear but the style of the letters represents the writing of the 7th /early 8th centuries (See Fig. 17). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

[He is Allah, the One and Only]; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute;

كذا [....الله الصمد. الله]. [....قل هو الله احد]

Fig. 17 Inscription 1 (Photo by Author)

<u>Inscription 2</u>

Another block of stone is present at the entrance to the church It is engraved in simple Kufic script crafted with the relief letter style on the sandstone. It consists of two lines of inscription. What is legible is a personal name (male) and a surname, but the rest of the writing is unclear. The style of the letters here also represents the writing of the 7th /early 8th centuries (See Fig. 18). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1 - ..... Ibn Said [Rabie] Al-Nuaimi [Nuraldin]

2 - Seaweed or al-Taimi…………..

1- [نورالدين] النعيمي [ربيعه]ابن سعيد.....

2- الصمي او الطيمي [كذا]

Fig. 18 Inscription 2 (Photo by Author)

Inscription 3

A block of stone in the wall of the church. It is engraved in simple kufic script crafted with the relief letter style on the sandstone consists of three lines of inscription most of whose words are reasonably clear and can be read. There are two words, however, at the end of the first line where the letters are visible but difficult to read because the stone has been damaged by natural wear and tear. This makes the rest of the text difficult to interpret although it apparently bears the name of a person (male) and a surname (See Fig. 19). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1- May Allah have mercy on us .... The Hossam Sel

2- Abdul Shedl and not missing

3- there is no Allah except Allah with no partner......

١- يرحم الله....الـ[حــصـمـ] [سـلـ]مـا

٢- عبد ســهـلد ولا مفـقـود

٣- لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له......

There are other inscriptions, like this one, engraved in simple kufic script in different parts of the wall of the church repeating the same words *yarhum allah* (= God's mercy) followed by the name of the person seeking mercy or forgiveness or grace. This plea is common in Arabic inscriptions in general and generally uses some form of the roots *ghfr(غفر), twb(ناب), rhm(رحمه), brk(بركه)*.

Fig. 19 Inscription 3 (Photo by Author)

Inscription 4

This is an inscription carved into the side of the inner wall of the church, written in the same hand (by the same person, I am certain) as inscription 3. It is engraved in simple kufic script crafted with the relief letter style on a rectangular stone block and consists of two lines. One of the things one notices generally about this inscribed wall is that the Arabic script often suggests (though seldom so clearly as in this case) that there were fewer writers than inscriptions, that one inscriber may have made a number of inscriptions, either for himself or perhaps for those who asked him to do it for them (See Fig. 20). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1- May Allah have mercy ……….

2-[Abdul Shedl] ???and not missing

1- يرحم الله....الـ[حـصـمـ] [سـل]مـا

2- [عبد ســهلد] ولا مفقــود

Fig. 20 Inscription 4 (Photo by Author)

Inscription 5

Engraved in simple kufic script in another part of the inner wall of the church repeating the same phrase, *yarhum allah,* followed by the name of the person. This is carved into the side of the inner wall of the church in relief letter style on a rectangular stone block. It consists of two lines containing the name of a person called Omar, whose name is apparently followed by the name of his father and the surname (See Fig. 21). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1- May Allah have mercy Omar.

2- Ben .[Al-Z] aidi.

1- يرحم الله....عمر

2- بن[الــز]ــيد.

Fig. 21 Inscription 5 (Photo by Author)

Inscription 6

On the wall above Inscription 5, there is another inscription, written in simple Kufic script, engraved on a mass of stones crafted with the relief letter style. It consists of two lines of inscription containing the name of a person also called Omar and apparently the name followed by the name of the father and the surname (See Fig. 22). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1- May God have mercy Alhijab.

2- [Abd] Allah[Nasr]…

1- رحم الله الحجـــــــاب

Fig. 22 Inscription 6 (Photo by Author)

Inscription 7

This inscription consists of three lines written in simple Kufic script engraved on a mass of stones crafted with the relief letter style. Reading the text is difficult as some of the letters are not clear because of the state of the stone (See Fig. 23). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1- Dayr ..... [Mortu]

2- .... S???

3- Y[z] d Alhjab

1- دير .....[مـــرتـــو]

2- ....ـصـ ؟؟؟

3- يـ[ـز] د الحـجـاب.

The word in the first line reads *dayr.* This word meant originally a (? Christian) monastery, ie. a building or buildings occupied by a community of monks living under religious vows. The word has also been found in an engraved inscription on one of the walls of the church of Ras al-Hilal (see 2.3). It is found more than once in engravings

on the walls of the Tolmeitha church. We do not have a clear explanation for the presence of this word in the inscriptions there, as there are no examples in other early Islamic inscriptions. The interesting possibility cannot be ruled out that with this word a Christian influence has appeared in the midst of an Islamic text, because monks living in community would, of course, be characteristic of Christian and not of Moslem religious life. Perhaps even there were religious groups in the city living a recollected life which drew upon both faiths.

Fig. 23 Inscriptions 7 (Photo by Author)

Inscription 8

In the middle of the church wall there is a carved inscription, on a mass of stones, crafted with the relief letter style. It consists of three lines written in simple engraved kufic script. Reading the text is difficult in line 2 as some of the letters are not clear because of the state of the stone (See Fig. 24). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1- This corridor

2- [H] The Bale .... Ben

3- Sheribeel Zaidi

<div dir="rtl">

1- هـــــذا المـــمر

2- [هـــ]ـذا للبـ........ بن

3- شــــرحبيل الـــزيــدي

</div>

The word meaning "corridor" is repeated in other inscriptions on the walls of the inner church. It is difficult to know what it might mean. Does it perhaps refer to some kind of family or larger social relationship (see Inscription 9).

Fig. 24 Inscription 8 (Photo by Author).

Inscription 9

There is another engraved inscription on the same wall, consisting of a single line written in simple engraved Kufic script. The first word is difficult to read owing to the condition of the stonework. In this inscription we notice that the name of Zaidi was repeated and when we compare it to the Inscription 8, we note a great similarity in the

way the letters have been written and therefore there is a great possibility that they were written by the same hand (See Fig. 25). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1- [YB]Lighuh [H]dha of the Zaidi corridor…

1- [يــــــ]ـلغه [هـ]ـذا مـمـر الــزيــدي.....

Fig. 25 Inscription 9 (Photo by Author)

There are many other carved inscriptions on other parts of the front and back walls of the Church, which contain many Arabic names such as Omar, Yazid, Ismael etc. No attempt has been made to identify any of these names. There may be historical personages among them, but any identification would be hopelessly speculative. It seems just a habit, especially among Arabs, to record one's name in some remarkable places. Here are some further examples.

Inscription 10

Written in simple Kufic script, engraved on a mass of stones crafted with the relief letter style, consisting of two lines of inscription containing the name of a person named Younis Yazd in the first line. The second line has the name Shaaban or Samaean, perhaps the name of the father. The rough surface of the stone makes many details of the inscription unclear (See Fig. 26). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1- May God have mercy on Younis Yazd.

2- ..... [Shaaban or Simon].......?

١- يرحم الله...يـــونـس يزد

٢- .....شعـــــبان او سمعـــــان......

Fig. 26 Inscription 10 (Photo by Author)

Inscription 11

And similarly (See Fig. 27). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1- .....Some....??

2- Ishmael [sic]

3- Ben Abdullah

1- ??....ضــــــعب.....
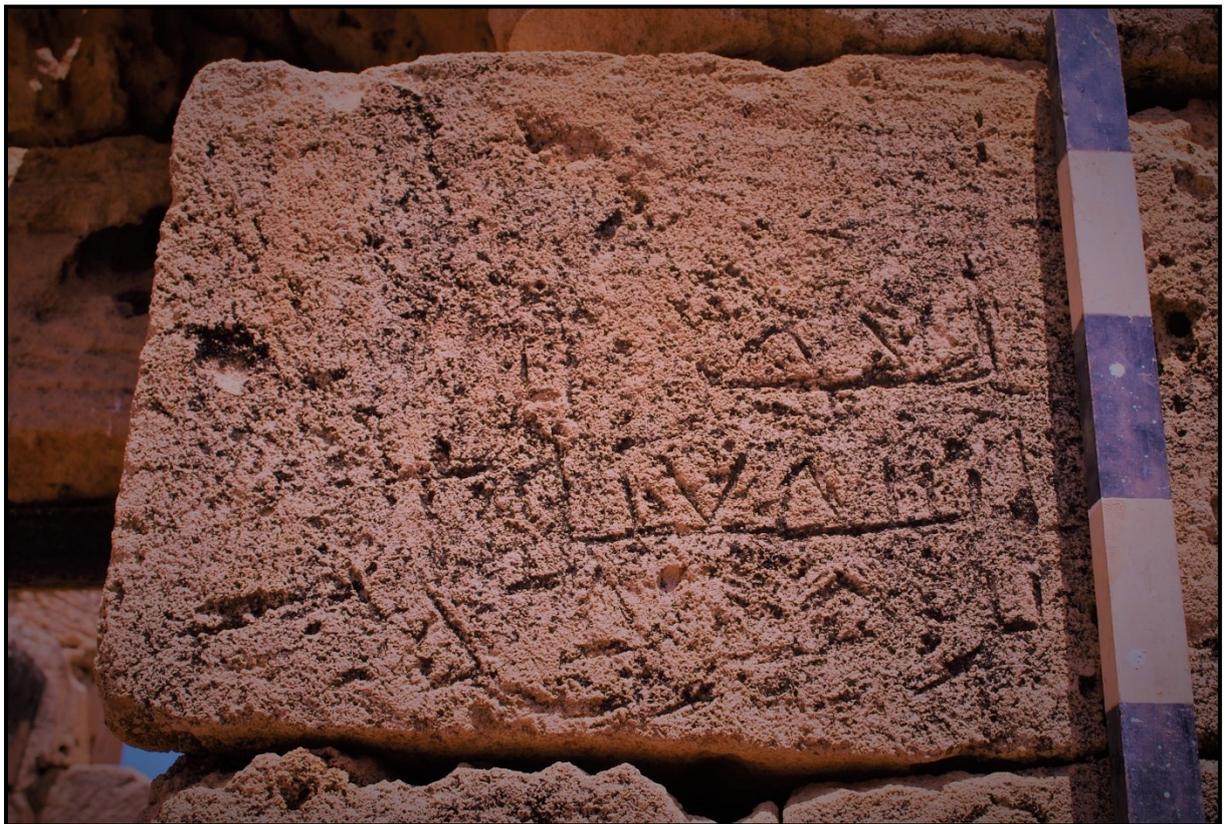
2- اسمــــعيل[كذا]

3- بــن عبــد اللـــه

Fig. 27 Inscriptions 11(Photo by Author)

Inscription 12

Or again, with greater brevity! (See Fig. 28). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:
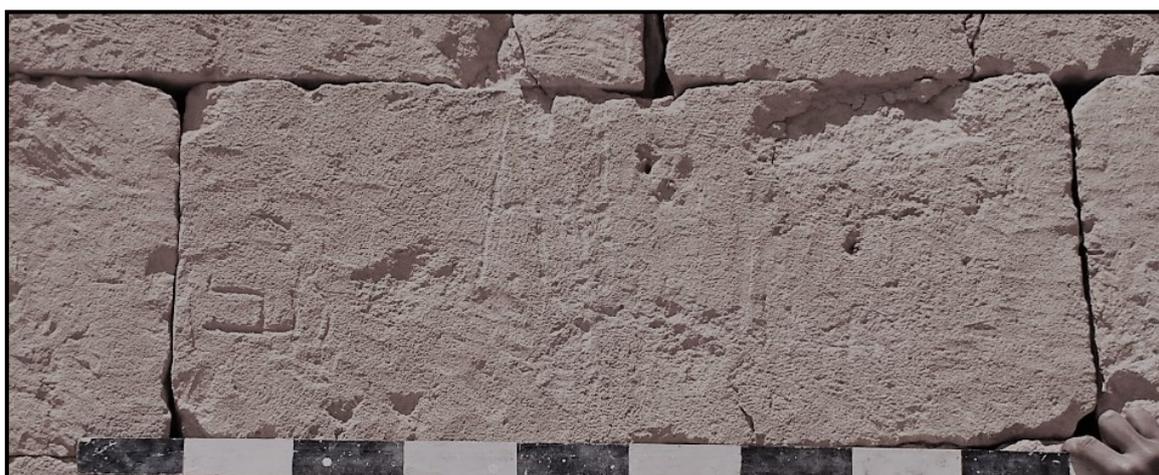
1- Yazid

<div dir="rtl">1- يـــزيـــــد</div>

Fig. 28 Inscription 12 (Photo by Author)

General remarks on Ptolemais inscriptions

The inscriptions on the walls of this church were written in the simple Kufic script which was in common use in the 7th and 8th centuries. The Arabic inscriptions in the west church in Ptolemais contain no dates, but they can nevertheless be confidently dated since they use the simple Kufic script which is commonly found in Cyrenaica inscriptions in securely dated examples. For instance, there is a gravestone currently preserved in the Cyrene store dated to 154AH/776CE whose similarity to the Ptolemais inscriptions is strikingly evident in the style of writing in the following letters:

letters: Dal ( ), Alha (/),Mim (/) and alllam 'alf ( ). There are also other examples which have these letters formed in a similar way: from Egypt, the headstone of Abdul Rahman or Hijazi, dated to the year 31AH/653CE; and from the Arabian Peninsula, the inscription of Taif Dam, dated to the year 58 AH/680 CE (See Fig. 29 A&B); or the gravestone of Abash Ben Hdeg dated to the year

71AH/693CE, and the inscription of Al-Asilh of the year 100AH/722CE (See Fig. 30 A&B). All these examples have been dated to the 7th and 8th centuries.

In content, the inscriptions selected here closely resemble other known inscriptions from western Arabia. There is introductory comment on this habit of writing one's name on a wall or a piece of stone in chapter 1 (1.7.1). Most inscriptions are brief prayers for forgiveness or mercy, or religious invocations or confessions, together with the name of the petitioner.

The content of these inscriptions are varied as we have noticed, and use Kuranic verses such as the image of faithfulness (inscription No. 1); or other formulae, such as the claim for mercy and forgiveness (God's mercy, God forgive) as in inscriptions 3 and 4. A number of names are also mentioned in the inscriptions in this church, all of which are common Arabic names such as Ibn Sa'id, Al-Walid, Abdullah, Shaaban or Simon, Sharhabil. A family name, also of a common Arabic kind, is also mentioned in some of them, such as Al-Naimi and Al-Zaidi.
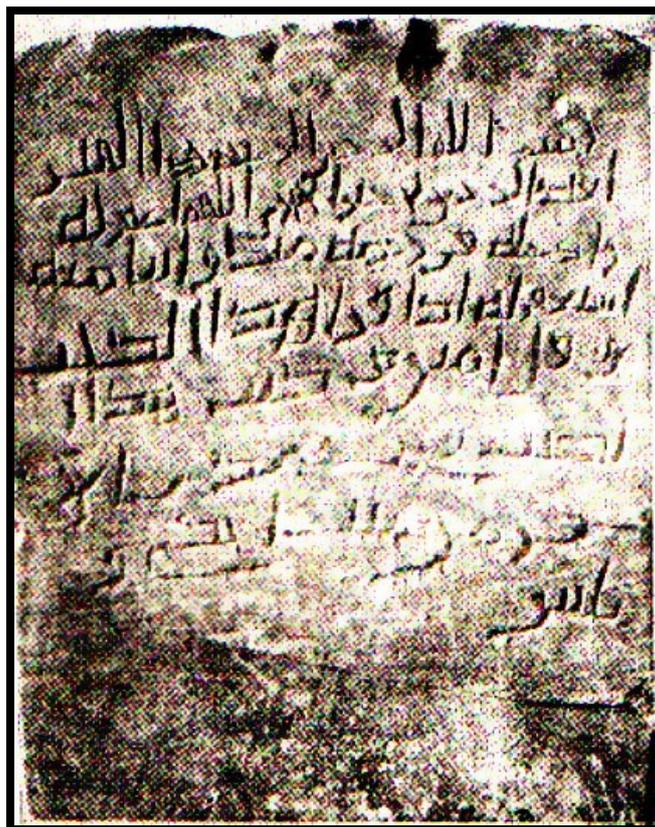
Fig. 29A The headstone of Abdul Rahman or Hijazi (31AH/653CE) (after Bubtana 2007, p.16, fig.4A).
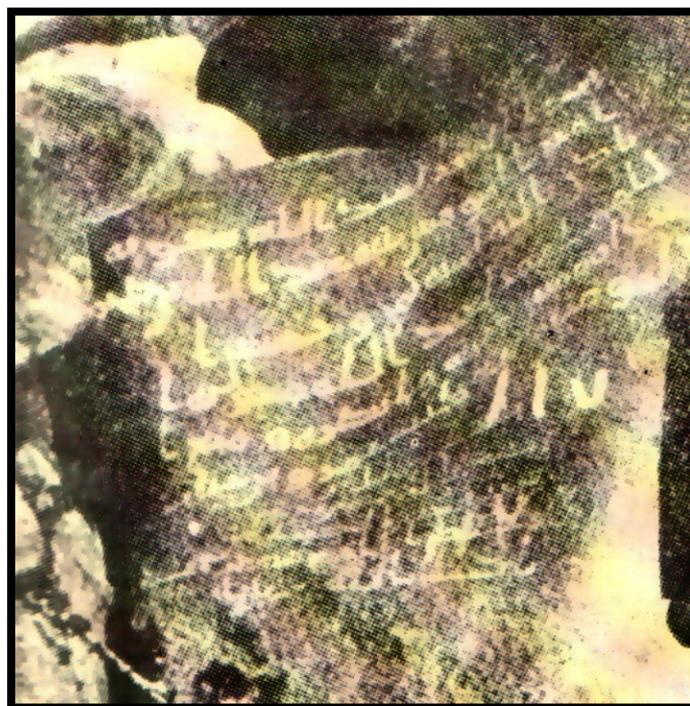

Fig. 29B The inscription of Taif Dam (58AH/680CE) (after Bubtana 2007, p.16, fig.4B).

Fig. 30A The gravestone of Abash Ben Hdeg (71AH/693CE) (after Bubtana 2007, p.16, fig.5A).
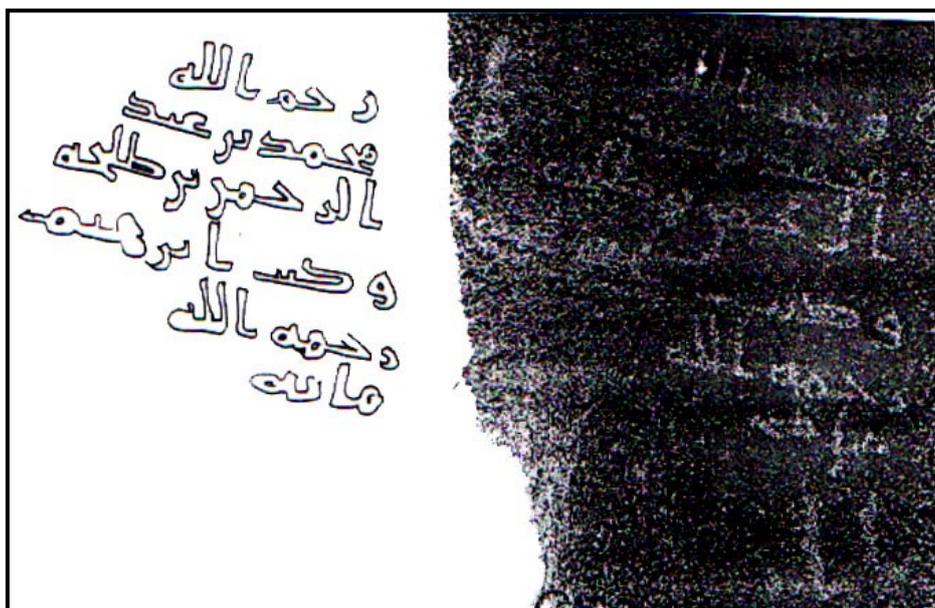

Fig. 30B The inscription of Al-Asilh (100AH/722CE) (after Bubtana 2007, p.16, fig.5B).

2.2.5. Conclusions and recommendations

Overall even if the data from the excavation do not allow precise dating, the inscriptions suggest that the city was certainly inhabited in the early Islamic period. The house G and the nearby house of the triapsidal hall all suggested that this sector of the city was quite intensively inhabited with several buildings on two storeys and the presence of olive presses and materials connected with production activities. This must have been a residential sector of the city, which developed along one of the main monumental roads of the Roman and Byzantine city.

The early Arab sources refer to the presence of a fort in the city. No fortifications have been identified. It is possible that this is determined by the lack of specific excavations, but it is also possible that the Arab text, which is later, is in fact referring to the city walls.

The graffiti in the west church offers some interesting evidence of an intense use of the complex in the early Islamic period and probably later. The graffiti are very vague and do not support any interpretation of the use of the church; the only clear evidence is that at least part of the population of the city was Arab, as Arab names are recorded in the graffiti. Unfortunately, the excavations in the buildings have removed all the evidence of the later occupation of the church, and it is very difficult at present to make any suggestion. Its vicinity to the city wall can be noted, and it is possible that it may have been part of a defensive complex. Lack of excavations and lost data do not allow any further interpretation.

A final point on the importance of the city needs to be made. The pottery evidence suggesting a continuity of occupation until the 13th century, seems to suggest that the city continued to play a significant role for a long time, probably for its coastal location.

2.3. The church at Ras el-Hilal

The Christian church at Ras el-Hilal, dating from the 6th century, was probably connected to the presence of a settlement, divied between the lowlands and uplands. The church of Ras el-Hilal is located on a hill top. Unfortunately the surrounding area has not been subject of excavations (Kenrick 2013, pp.319-320) (See Fig. 31).
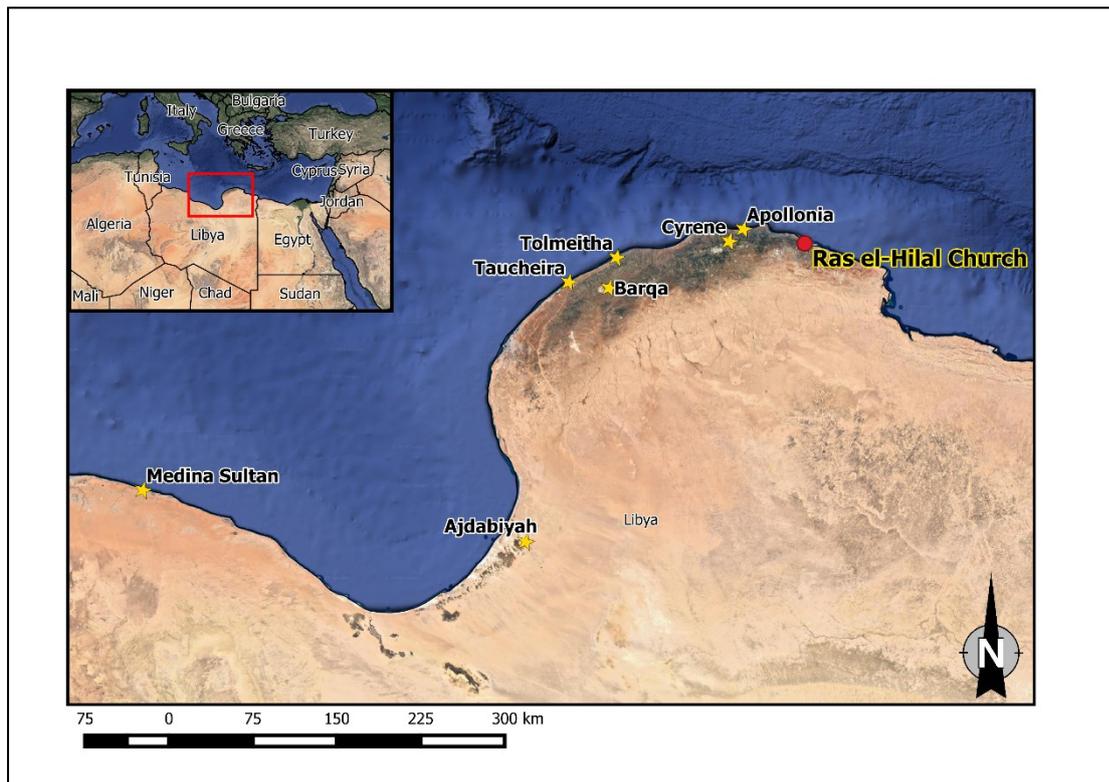

Fig. 31 Close-up map of the location of the church at Ras el-Hilal (by Author elaborated from Google Earth).

The church can be dated with confidence to the "late-second or third quarter of the sixth century" and is "an unfortified rural church [of the kind that] would be built in relatively peaceful times" (Harrison 1964, p.14). There are signs of repair carried out to collapsing masonry in the early Arabic period, and of thick plastering, from about the same date, of the flooring of the apse, chancel, and nave (Harrison 1964, p.15). It seems worth remark that, while plastering was going on, no attempt was made to plaster over the Christian mosaics, which show praying figures.

The Greek and Latin inscriptions/graffiti in the church, which date from before the Arab invasion, consist of: fragments of plaster moulding which have been painted on inscriptions on mosaics in the nave; graffiti; a possible 4th century engraved milestone incorporated into the structure of the church. The name of Christ appears, and (of particular interest in the graffiti) the name of Abraham two or three times, probably invoked as the prophet Abraham (Harrison 1964, Appendix I by J. M. Reynolds). Miss Reynolds suggests that the prophet Abraham may have been "especially honoured here" (Harrison 1964, p.16) (See Fig. 32).
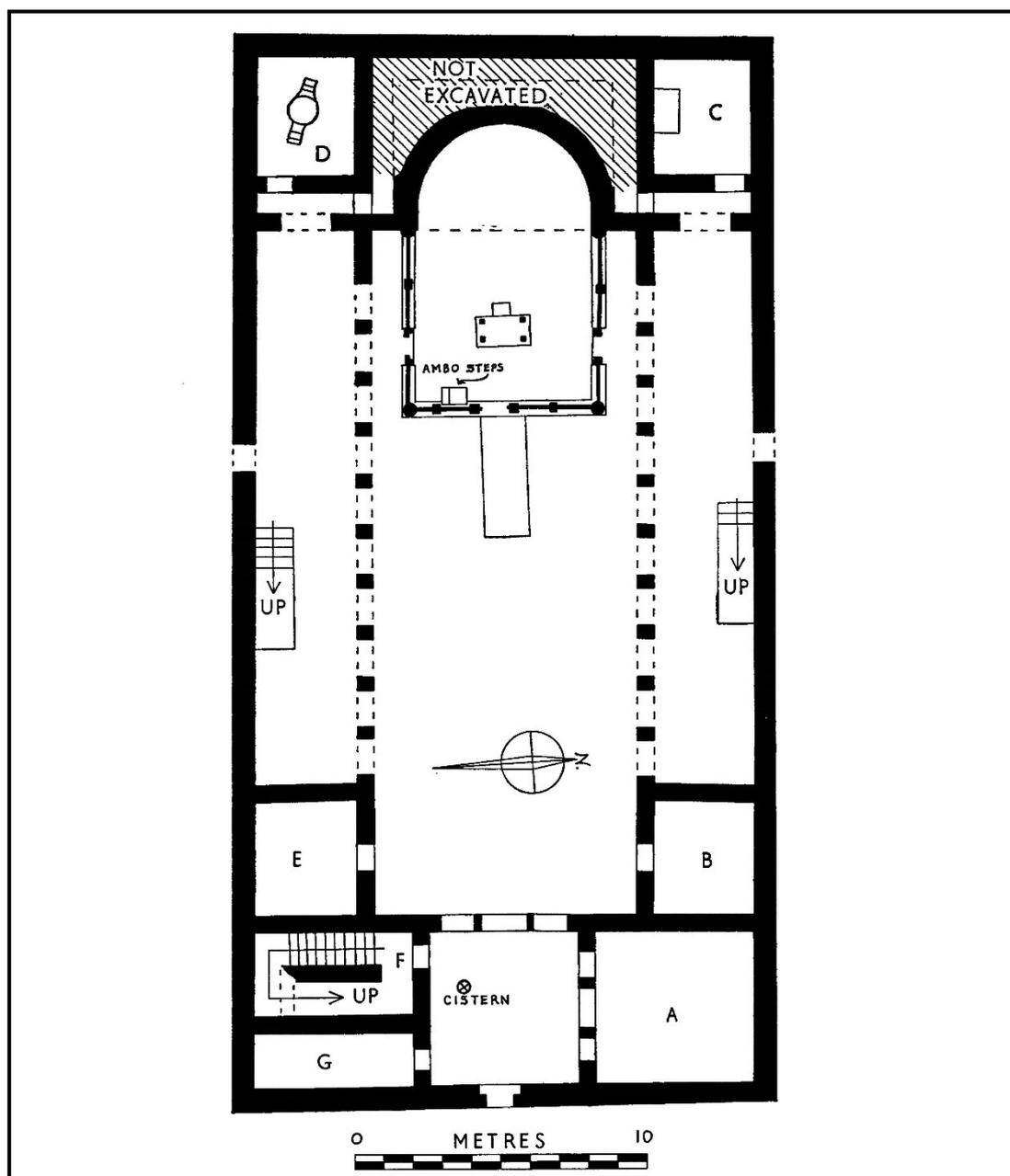
Fig. 32 Plan of the church at Ras el-Hilal (after Harrison 1964, p.3)

The Arabic inscriptions/graffiti (considered in textual detail in the following section) consist of six fragmentary texts, one dated to June-July 112AH/7234CE (Harrison 1964, p.20, and n.47), that is about eighty years after the Arab invasion, and this one not too difficult to read, together with five others (Harrison 1964, Appendix II by S M Stern). The inscriptions contain the expected exhortations to piety towards God (or Allah); but the dated one, the one reasonably easy to read, which was found on the northern pier of the arch across the north aisle, was written by 'Shihab, son of Ibrahim' (Harrison 1964, p.20; *inscription 2 below*). It may be that Ibrahim was written in Ras el-Hilal dialect and normally pronounced colloquially 'Brahim', because the word is spelled in the inscription without its initial *aleph* (Harrison 1964, p.20). This is perhaps a fragmentary indication that the honouring of the prophet Abraham evident in the Christian inscriptions in the church may have survived the Arab invasion by at least eighty years. Indeed in Islamic belief Abraham occupies an honoured place, though not of course so central a place, as he does in Jewish and Christian belief. What is as interesting is the use also in inscription 2, of the Arabic word *dayr* which has to be translated, as remarked above (2.2.4.2), as 'monastery':

fi dayr al-mh ('in the monastery of al-Mah'). 'Monastery' must mean some kind of Christian presence or influence. Stern adds a note that "this need not imply that there was still a Christian community: the name may have been preserved, although the church was now in ruins" (Harrison 1964, p.20, n.48). Ward-Perkins observes that:

"The presence of the Arabic texts has generally been taken to mean that Christian use of the building had ceased by a date early in the eighth century. If the reference to a monastery is correctly read, and if it is correct to suppose that it concerns [this] church rather than some more distant place from which the writer was absent on a journey, we have to assume that the Christian description of the building survived for a time

after Christian use had ceased. That is not hard to accept. On the other hand, it is not at present obvious that the site was ever monastic (Ward-Perkins and Goodchild 2003, p.341)".

But if the Christian designation of the building had survived while it was being saved from ruination by extensive repair, and if there is some suspicion that references to Abraham filter across from the Christian writing on the walls to the Arabic, then perhaps it is wrong to let the presence of Arabic texts mean the simple replacement of the one religion by the other. Was there some religious and social context in Ras el-Hilal which wove together the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim elements among the people living nearby, at least well into the time of the Arabic Muslim presence there? Do we have here in the church at Ras el-Hilal a fragmentary glimpse (in Inscription 2 below) of what might have been a solid everyday reality in the early 8th century? Could the phrase "son of Ibrahim" even have a technical religious or canonical connotation and refer to what a Christian might be disposed to call a monk from a community devoted to the honouring of the prophet common to Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike?

We know, of course, that at the time of the death of the Prophet, the great single tribe of all Muslim believers, the *ummah*, accepted the status of those who were not believers, were *hunafa*, outside the *ummah*, but who worshipped the one God and possessed sacred scriptures. This fundamental acceptance perhaps underlies the similarities here in Ras el-Hilal between Greek and Latin inscriptions on the one hand and Arabic Muslim inscriptions on the other.

2.3.1. The texts of some Arabic inscriptions

The inscriptions presented here have all been re-examined by the present writer, and all drawings of inscriptions are the work of the present writer. Where there are no drawings, it is because the condition of the stone made detailed drawing impossible. These inscriptions are now preserved in the museum of Soussa.

On the interior walls of the church was discovered a group of Arabic inscriptions incised on the plaster, excepting one which was carved on sandstone. Harrison undertook a study of the church in 1963 and it was he who published these inscriptions (Harrison 1964). The inscriptions date to the early Islamic period and have no 'grand' significance beyond the fact that a group of Arabs settled in this area and made the church their headquarters and wrote their names and the place of their habitation as a remembrance which they associated with the tutelage in the piety and strength of God. Most of these inscriptions cannot be clearly understood, the inscription which was cut on the pier/buttress of the arch located in the north colonnade is to be dated to 104AH/726CE (ie. Inscription 2 here), that is to the Umayyad period. Besides being datable it is also the clearest of the group.

Inscription 1

A presentation of the inscription:

This inscription was on the eastern face of the east wall of Room C but is now preserved in the Museum of Sousse. It is inscribed in incised simple Kufic script on sandstone coated with a plaster layer. The inscription consists of seven lines, some words being lost from the first and last line. We can see that this inscription includes two names: the first is Abdullah ibn al-Azraq ibn Thaelib al-Homsi, and the second is the probable writer/carver of the inscription Al'aswad bin Hassan. The word Hassan is, I am almost certain, the reading, according to the letters that I can make out (See Fig. 33). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1. .... Abdullah

2. ibn al-Azraq ibn Thael[ib]

3. al-Homsi and

4. He wrote it in

5. year Fifty-two

6. .... wah 'iilaa

7. Aswad Ben Hassan

1. .... عـــبدالله

2. الازرق بن ثعـلبـــ[ـه]

3. الحمــصي و

4. كـــــتبه في

5. سنة ثنتين وخمسين

6. .....وه الا

7. اسود بن حسن

Fig. 33 Inscription 1 (after Harrison 1964, p.20, pl.XII, a).

The inscription has a date that Harrison could not read but he pointed out in the margin of his article that it was earlier than 100 Hijri (Harrison 1964, p.20). I have been able to read the date of it: 52AH/674CE ie. the beginning of the first half of the 8th century, about 28 years after the Islamic conquest of Cyrenaica. This inscription is the oldest of the Arabic inscriptions in the church at Ras el-Hilal.

Abdullah bin Azraq bin Tha'lab was from the tribe of Tha'lab, Thalbh. Some historians, such as ibn al-Atheer, point out that the origin of this tribe is among the children of Israel and that some of them came from the Arabs. This tribe lived in Hijaz. The title al-Homsi is perhaps a reference to Abdullah being from the Syrian city of Homs but

this is not quite certain. We also note in this inscription that the writer was influenced by the Nabatean style, especially in the division of words and their distribution between two lines, and that he deleted the *aleph* letter from the middle. The Nabatean style was the first Arabic style of writing (before Kufic), and dates from the pre-Islamic period. There are quite often traces of it remaining in Kufic inscriptions/graffiti, particularly in the habit of dividing words between lines, in the omission of final (and sometimes initial) *aleph,* and in the final flourish of the written letter. What we often cannot be sure of, of course, is whether the omission of *aleph* is a purely scribal habit, or whether, as I have suggested above with the name Ibrahim, it represents an omission of that spoken sound إبراهيم in actual colloquial speech (Bubtana 2007, p.80).

Inscription 2

A presentation of the inscription:

This inscription, clearly dated 104AH/726CE, was on the northern pier of the arch across the north aisle, and is now preserved in the Museum of Sousse. It is fairly clearly inscribed in incised Kufic script on sandstone. It has ten lines. We can see that this inscription includes two names: the first is Abd Al-Rahman bin Ziyad and the second is the writer/carver of the inscription 'Urwa Shahab bin Ibrahim (See Fig. 34). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1. Abdulrahman bin

2. Ziad Ahmed

3. ...

4. And his residence in

5. Monastery of the Al-Mah……

6. Written in Muharram [Sanata] (in this year)

7. One hundred and four

8. Urwa Shihab

9. Bin Brhiam [sic] (Ibrahim

10. Yashhad???? (he witnesses????)

<div dir="rtl">

1. عبـــدالـــرحمن بــن

2. زيـــاد احمـــــد

3. ....

4. ومسكنه في

5. ديـــــر المحـ...

6. كـــتبـــه فـي المـــحرم [ســـنه]

</div>

7. اربــــع ومـــائة

8. عـــــروة شـــهاب

9. بــن بـــرهيــــم [كذا]

10. يشهـــد؟؟؟؟

Fig. 34 Inscription 2 (after Harrison 1964, p.20, pl.XII, b).

We can see that this inscription includes two names: the first is Abd Al Rahman bin Ziyad and the second is the writer/carver of the inscription, 'Urwa Shihab bin Ibrahim. It appears that this Abd Al Rahman did not know how to write and 'Urwa undertook the writing instead of him and did not neglect to record his name as scribe. It may perhaps even be that 'bin Ibrahim' may mean 'son of Abraham' in a religious sense rather than an ordinary family sense. Could it be that the 'monastery of the Al-Mah' housed monks who were known as the 'sons of Abraham'?

It is interesting to note that this inscription shows the use of consonantal points on the letters and we can see this most closely with the 'Urwa Shahab name. There is use of consonantal points for the *shin* (ش). This use of consonantal pointing can be set, as follows, in a larger context.

It has usually been thought that at the beginning Arabic writing was not written down with diacritical marks because they were not needed, the Arabs being used to reading their own language without making mistakes, despite some of the letters being similar. Context was usually sufficient for the interpretation of them. One of the earliest Arabic papyri yet discovered, dating from 22 AH/642-643 CE, does, however, show diacritical dotting. This papyrus fragment of an Arabic tax demand is requesting one and a half dinars for the year's taxes. Dots can be seen on the letter *alnuwn* (ن). We can see also that an inscription found on the dam built by the Caliph Mu'awiyah, 58 AH / 678 AD Near Ṭa'if in the Ḥijaz, Saudi Arabia, shows the use of consonantal points for *alba*(ب) in كتب, *altta*(ت) in متع, *alththa*(ث) in ثمن & ثبته, *alkha*(خ), *alfa*(ف) in اغفر and *alya*(ي) in معاوية & خمسين. This establishes beyond doubt that in the sixth decade of the hijira certain letters were already pointed (Miles1948, p.240).

Inscription 3

A presentation of the inscription:

This is a half of an inscription found above Inscription 2. It was on the southern pier of the arch across south aisle and is now preserved in the Museum of Sousse. The inscription is inscribed in incised Kufic script on sandstone. It has three lines. Some text has survived, with the name of a person but no date. There is almost no decoration of any sort, although some letters have a final triangular flourish, such as the alba(?) (See Fig. 35). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1. Allah's mercy......Ali bin Abi Qasim [sic]

2. blessing or righteousness????? Allah and the Prophet???

3 Guardian ....

1. يرحم الله ؟؟؟...... علي بن ابي القـــــسم[كذا] يــو

2. صـــي (ببركة أو بئّر؟؟؟؟؟) الله والنـــبي؟؟؟

3. وصـــي ....

The inscription bears the name Ali ibn Abi al-Qasim, but the first two words of the first line are lost, perhaps an appeal for forgiveness and God's mercy. We also note in this inscription that the writer was influenced by the Nabatean style, in the division of words and their distribution on two lines as well as the deletion of the *aleph* letter.

Fig. 35 Inscription 3 (after Harrison 1964, p.20, pl.XII, e).

Inscription 4

A presentation of the inscription:

This inscription was found on the eastern face of the east wall of Room D and is now preserved in the Museum of Sousse. The inscription is in incised simple Kufic script on sandstone. It has five lines. Most of the words have been lost from the last line except the first word which is also difficult to read. The text presents us with the names of people but no date, and with almost no decoration of any sort (See Fig. 36). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1. Allah's mercy??? ...... bin Abi Qasim [sic]

2. ....It is recommended ????? to bless Allah

3. And mercy ?????... and recommended (the wasaa) of the memory of........

4. Allah

5. ....????

1. يرحم الله ؟؟؟ ...... بن ابي القـــــسم[كذا]

2......... وصـــي ببركة ؟؟؟؟؟ الله و

3. والرحــــمة ؟؟؟؟؟وصـــي بذكــــر ....

4.الله

5.........................؟؟؟؟

The inscription bears the name ibn Abi al-Qasim. The first two words of the first line are lost. They were perhaps an appeal for forgiveness and God's mercy; or the word God may be used as a name, ie. Abdallah. We also note in this inscription that the writer was influenced by the Nabatean style, especially in the division of words and their distribution on two lines and that he deletes the *aleph* letter from the middle.
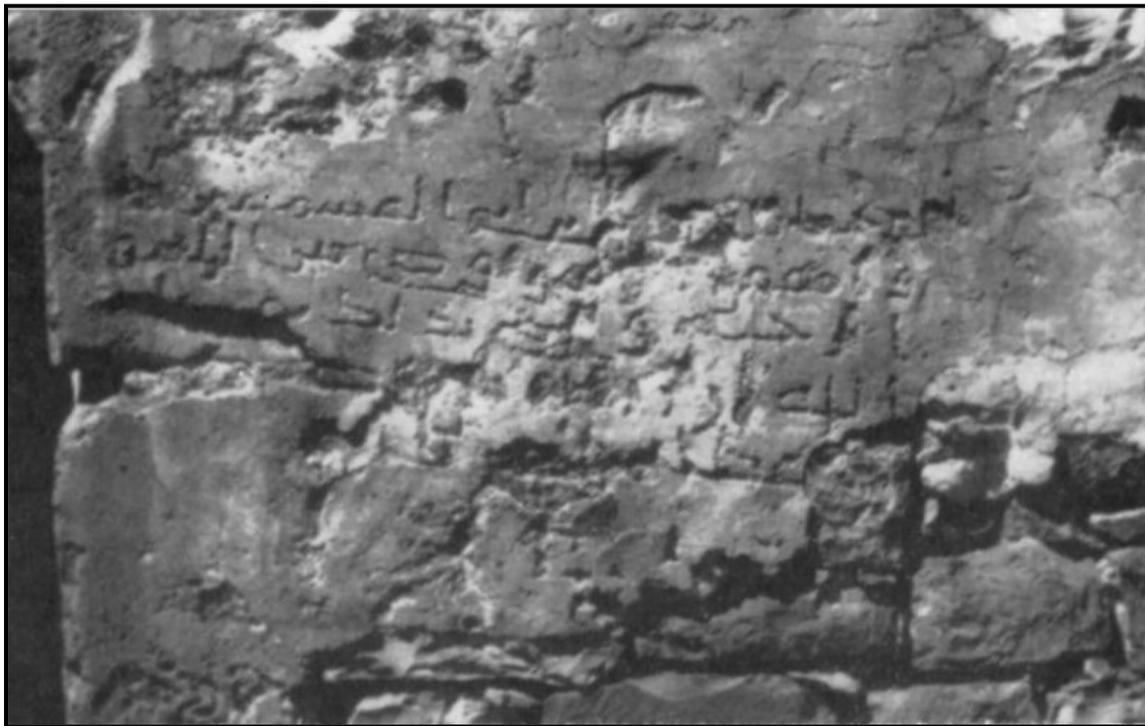

Fig. 36 Inscription 4 (after Harrison 1964, p.20, pl.XII, d)

The last two inscriptions in the church contain no dates, but they can nevertheless be confidently dated to the 7th or 8th century since they use the simple Kufic script which can be compared with other inscriptions in the same church inscriptions (1 & 2)

similarity is strikingly evident in the style of writing in the following letters:Dal (⟨glyph⟩- ⟨glyph⟩),

Alha (⟨glyph⟩- ⟨glyph⟩/ ⟨glyph⟩),Mim (⟨glyph⟩/ ⟨glyph⟩) ,Ra (⟨glyph⟩/ ⟨glyph⟩),Waw (⟨glyph⟩- ⟨glyph⟩/ ⟨glyph⟩)

alllam 'alf (⟨glyph⟩).

2.3.2. Conclusions and recommendations

The evidence from the church of Ras el Hilal brings up one of the major problems of dealing with Christian monuments in North Africa. Most of the churches were in fact excavated in the colonial period, and not stratigraphically. This has had a major impact on our understanding of the end of Christianity in North Africa. The excavators in fact always assumed that the churches were all abandoned after the conquest and proposed the dating based on this evidence. This interpretation is, however, in stark contrast with the textual evidence which in many cases refers to the presence of a Bishop in many North African cities still in the 8th, 9th century. (Meier 1973). Issues of continuity and use of churches also with religious functions have been discussed in more recent times (Handley 2004). It is suggestive to think that the use of Abraham and the continuing presence in the cult inside the church may have been connected to either a continuity of Christian practices or to the transition of the same cult in the Muslim faith. The data at the moment do not allow any further consideration.

2.4.3. Conclusion

This chapter has analysed critically the evidence from three long-term inhabited sites. Although the data are too scanty to discuss these transformations in depth, a few considerations can be offered.

1. In the case of Tolmeitha and Tocra the early Islamic evidence indicates the presence of rather intensively inhabited settlements, characterised by houses

and production activities. The presence of olive presses indicates, probably, the existence of some cultivated areas within the former city. None of the three settlements were subject to any shock, and the conquest did not seem to have a significant impact on the settlement.

2. The order and organisation of the former cities does not appear to have been respected and reuse and recycling was significant.

3. There is no clearly recorded evidence of mosques, but the finding of an inscription and the potential continuity of use of the churches of Tolmeitha and Ras el -Hilal , as religious buildings and/or as part of monasteries, cannot be ruled out

4. The case of Tolmeitha, a coastal city, which continued to be occupied into the 13th century indicates continuity of trade and exchange probably with the East.

Chapter 3 : Barqa (ie. el-Merj)

3 The aim of this chapter

This chapter aims to discuss another important centre, which developed probably from an existing city. The difference with the previous sites is that Barqa continued to be a centre of a certain importance for a very long time. It is important to highlight here that this importance is also reflected in the site of Tolmeitha, which continued to be occupied until the 13th century.

3.1 Geography and history

The town of Barqa (now el-Merj al-Qadim) is particularly difficult to investigate archaeologically, because the old city was effectively destroyed by an earthquake[25] in February 1963, and little remains visible of what was until then a reasonably ordered and visible survival from the remote past, of a city at one time so influential as to have bequeathed its name to the whole region; so that Cyrenaica as a whole is now, in modern times, known in Arabic as Barqa. The identification of a pre-mediaeval town, as distinct from the region, called Barqa with the Arabic town of El-Merj was first made in the 13th century by the traveller, Ibn Said. He writes that Barqa is certainly the name of a region including many towns and villages between Alexandria and Ifriqiyah; and that "the town of Barqa was the capital of the Barqa region but the Arabs destroyed it [ie. the pre-Islamic town]. It is said today to be the town of el-Merj. Between it and Tolmeitha is ten miles" (Ibn Said, 1840, p.146, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 14). Ibn Said, then, is saying that there was a pre-mediaeval town called

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[25] 'Libya is not usually thought of as a seismically active country' (Suleiman 2004, p553), but a number of earthquakes are documented for the classical period, although information is largely lacking for the medieval and early modern periods. The best documented Cyrenaican earthquake is probably that of 364CE (Bacchielli 1995).

Barqa which was destroyed in the process of the Arabic invasion of Cyrenaica; and that the site of this town was, when he visited the area, identified with the then existing town of el-Merj. This identification by ibn Said of Barqa with el-Merj seems somewhat insecure, and we are faced by the difficulty that a number of the Arabic sources describing the town of Barqa, from the 9th to the 14th centuries, seem simply to repeat and copy each other, with greater or less accuracy, and to provide no actual proof of the identification of Barqa with El-Merj. It is not clearly known, either, how a town said by this 13th century traveller to have been destroyed by the Arab invaders in the 7th century should have in some way preserved itself in a name which became the common Arabic term for the whole Cyrenaica region. In view of what has been written in the earlier chapters of this thesis, one might suppose, in fact, that this 13th century traveller's assertion that the invading Arab armies destroyed the pre-Islamic town of Barqa should be treated with the greatest suspicion. There is no archaeological evidence of destruction, and the destroying of a pre-Islamic settlement rather than an absorbing of a more than partially acquiescent non-Islamic town into the relaxed new order would be an extraordinary break with what seems to have happened everywhere else in Cyrenaica.

The supposition that there was a pre-medieval town called Barqa and that it was on the site of the mediaeval Islamic town now called el-Merj al-Qadim, does, however, need further support. The support must come from topographical descriptions in the travel writing of Arabic authors between the 9th and 11th centuries, whether (as earlier) they are speaking simply of a town called Barqa, or (as later) they speak of el-Merj as well. We must approach these topographical descriptions with caution, both because a number of the writers had never set foot in the places they describe, and also because some of the topographical descriptions are vague enough to be referring to

the region of Barqa, which we may take as quite undoubtedly existing in the pre-medieval and medieval period.

Al-Yaqoubi then, in the middle of the 9th century, describes, and had certainly visited, a town which he called Barqa (see 3.1.3 and the present writer's translation from the original Arabic). We know from him that Barqa/el-Merj was not far from the sea (not right beside the sea, but reasonably close); that it was in the middle of a large plain, which is unlikely to have been the coastal plain, which would place the town right next to the sea; with two ranges of hills; with abundant water which flowed down from the hills to a collecting point in the town; that the soil was a distinctive deep red colour (this particularly striking colour not found anywhere else in Cyrenaica). The distinctive red soil which Al-Yaqoubi saw in the town he called Barqa is now only known to be present in the mediaeval and modern town of el-Merj. We may, then, with reasonable certainty, suggest that el-Merj is Barqa on the grounds that there is no other town known now in Cyrenaica with this distinctive kind of red soil. This is certainly a negative and not a positive argument, and a negative argument is always more unreliable; but the further topographical details supplied by Al-Yaqoubi may convince us that he is actually describing, and naming as Barqa, the location of the present town of el-Merj al-Qadim, which we may take with reasonable certainty, therefore, to be on the site of a pre-medieval town called Barqa (Al-Yaqoubi 1892, pp.343-344, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 15). Since the earthquake, a new town of El-Merj has been built 5km from the old, known as El-Merj Al-Jadid.

3.1.1 Geography

The plain of Barqa, a few kilometres from the coast, offered in Byzantine times, and still does, a region of exceptionally fertile soil, which would convincingly account for the importance of the town in its midst, and for the sense that the town and the whole

agricultural region were an undivided whole. Barqa itself lies at almost the lowest point on its plain, and receives "considerable quantities of water-born soil in times of rain during the winter" (Dore 1991, p.91). There is evidence, presented by Dore, to suggest that the site has been regularly flooded, once or twice a year, over the centuries, and that this flooding has brought with it a deposit of "terra rossa" red sediment draining from the Jebel Akhdar and concentrating itself in this spot. The town itself was carefully built, however, on a slightly rising mound within the overall depression so that it was protected from all but the most exceptional flooding (Dore 1993, p.117; in detail see also the unpublished report on "Sedimentological characteristics of the el Merj Plain" by J.N. Dore, J.P Davidson& J.S Rowan (1992) in the Society for Libyan Studies Archive at Leicester University). As is often the case with archaeological sites subject to repeated flooding, the action of the water, both chemical and mechanical, seems to have produced at Barqa very complicated results. In some respects, the disturbance of stratification at regular intervals, over a long period of time, has an effect rather like that of a slowly occurring earthquake; and perhaps, indeed, the major earthquake in 1963 was not the first genuine earthquake that has occurred within the long history of the town, even though, as yet, there is no archaeological evidence for such a major upheaval before the earthquake of 1963. There can be no doubt that the town was established on its low-lying site because it naturally gathered water from its surrounding area; and, of course, when it was fully inhabited, regular water use by a stable population would have reduced flooding; but it must always have suffered from being naturally, as it were, an island in the middle of a lake.

3.1.2 History

In the middle of the 6th century BCE, there was an exodus of Greek citizens westwards from Cyrene because of dynastic quarrels, which resulted in the foundation of the

Greek city of Barqa, and a prolonged struggle between Cyrene and Barqa, with Cyrene finally triumphant. The town, however, flourished under the control of Cyrene, and an unusually evenly mixed population of Greeks and native Libyans grew and prospered as a consequence largely of the trade in silphium. [26] Although gradually more and more overshadowed by the importance of its own seaport, Tolmeitha , founded in the middle of the 4th century BCE, Barqa was still of sufficient importance in the middle of the 7th century CE to have been a principal early target for the invading Arabic forces, who took the town (but, as has been argued in 3.1, did not destroy it) in a decisive victory against the Byzantine rule and gave its name to the whole region of Cyrenaica (confusingly, since in early accounts which mention Barqa one cannot always be sure whether it is the city or the region which is meant - Dore 1994, p.267). Both the fact that Barqa in the middle of the 7th century CE was still, as it had been from the beginning, less thoroughly Greek or Roman than local and indigenous, and so more easily won over to the invading side (without any destruction), and the fact that the Arab invaders were more used to land travel than trading and travelling by sea, meant that the town steadily grew larger and more important in the years following the Arab conquest of the region (Abdussaid 1971, p.121; Kenrick 2013, pp.108-109). [27]

3.1.3 Barqa in the books of travellers and geographers

Al Yaqoubi in the mid-9th century makes clear the established importance of Barqa (see also the mention of Al-Yaqoubi in 3.1); he described the city at the end of the ninth century (278AH/900CE) in his book *Kitab al-Buldan* (The book of countries): "The town of Barqa is in a wide meadow; its soil is a vivid blushing red; it is a town which is

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[26] See 1.5.1 for more detail about silphium.

[27] More detail on the Arab conquest of Barqa and the history of the following centuries can be found in chapter 5.

walled, with gates of steel and a ditch; the construction of the fencing wall was ordered by Al Mutawakkil 'Alallah[28]. The inhabitants drink the rain which flows down in wadis from the hills into a great complex of tanks which were built by the Bammer caliphs and Emirs for the people of the city. Surrounding the town are its outskirts which are inhabited by both soldiers and non-soldiers; in both the houses of the town and of the outskirts live a variety of people most of whom are descended from veteran soldiers; between the town of Barqa and the sea is a distance of six miles; on the coast is a town known as Ajiyah[29] in which are markets, caravanserais [that is secured or protected places - the word used is *maharis*], a Friday mosque, gardens, cultivated areas and much fruit[fulness]; there is another port known as Tolmeitha where ships sometimes dock. Barqa has two ranges of hills, one of which is known as the east range and the other the west range (Al-Yaqoubi 1892, pp.343-344, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 15)".

Ibn Hawqal visited the city of Barqa in the second half of the 10th century and gives us more detail about the geography and economic life of the city in his book *Surat al-'Ard* (The image of the earth). He says, "Barqa is a city of middling size not very large nor very small. The city has prosperous and well inhabited suburbs... It is located in a spacious site and surrounded by mountains on all sides. The town is built on red soil and the clothing of its inhabitants is also reddish in colour." (Ibn Hawqal 1892, p.69, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 16). He writes also about the economic life and trade in the city. He tells us that: "in Barqa there are merchants and traders from many countries, the city is visited by many strangers all the time and trade is unceasing." The prosperity of the city merchants is clear from Ibn Hawqal's text: "the

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[28] al Mutawakkil 'Alallah: was an Abbasid caliph who reigned in Samarra from 847 until 861 CE.

[29] The location of this port is not known; it is something of a puzzle (Dore 1994, p.269).

sources of their funds are diverse and drawn from trade with tar and skins brought in for the tanner from Egypt and dates that come to the city from Oasis Awjila, with a variety of wool and pepper, honey, waxes, oil and various types of stores issued from the well-established markets of the east. The people drink rainwater saved in ponds" (Ibn Hawqal 1892, p.69, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 17).

Al-Muqaddasi[30] describes Barqa in the same period, the 10th century, in his book *Aḥsan al-taqāsim fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm* (The Best Divisions in the Knowledge of the Regions). He emphasises for us in his description how prosperous a city Barqa was, both economically and socially. He describes the city as follows: " Barqa is a great city densely populated, it has many goods, fruits and honey... it lies in a space surrounded by mountains, planted... and surrounded by red soil.... its inhabitants drinking from wells and from rain water stored in wells" (Muqaddasi 1906, p.224, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 18).

A century later, the city was still thriving when Al-Bakri visited it in the middle of the 11th century. He described Barqa as: "a city situated in a country where the soil and the buildings are red, and the clothes of those who settle there adopted the same colour... [and he stated that] provisions are at all times very abundant and very cheap in the area. The cattle spread over its pastures, and a great number are exported to Egypt and slaughtered there. Various kinds of fruits and honey and wool are also exported to Egypt, the wool being prepared in a place near Barqa, called Maga, situated on a high mountain, of difficult access and impossible to ascend on horseback...a great part of the area is covered with juniper, and people there are of

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[30] Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn al-Muqaddasī or al-Maqdisī , (c. 323AH/945CE- 369AH/991CE) was a medieval Arab geographer, author of *Aḥsan al-taqāsim fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm* (The Best Divisions in the Knowledge of the Regions).

different African tribes including those called the Lowata" (Al-Bakri 1857, pp.5-6, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 19).

Al-Idrisi mentions Barqa in Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi'khtiraq al-afaq (The book of pleasant journeys into faraway lands), written about a century later. He says it is: "a town of moderate dimensions and narrow limits, and in former times was a flourishing town situated in a wide-open plain of red earth, and was celebrated for an earth called by its name which was of great service, when mixed with oil, in cutaneous diseases. It was of reddish colour, and if it was thrown into the fire smelt strongly of sulphur, emitting at the same time a very offensive smoke; its taste was described as execrable" (Al-Idrisi 1866, pp.99-100, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 20).

By the late 13th century, the decline noted by Al 'Abdari had plainly run its course: "There is no town there by the name of Barqa and no town is known except Tolmeitha ...People know Barqa now just as the name of a region and not as the name of a town" (Al 'Abdari no date, p.81, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 21). This comment is particularly important to be considered in light of the evidence recorded in Tolmeitha, which shows instead a continued occupation into the 13th century, suggesting that maybe Tolmeitha was the centre of commercial activities.

John Dore suggests that by the 18th century and probably much earlier the town of Barqa had declined to a point where the name was used to refer only to the region, so that the town itself now became known as el-Merj (Dore 1994, p.271).

James Hamilton visited the site in 1852, when the remains of the town were still to be clearly seen. He described the Turkish castle, built the year before, as: "surrounded by many fragments of ancient buildings of Barqa ...the ruins of the Islamic city, and the

line of its walls...distinctly traceable" (Abdussaid 1971, pp.123-124; Hamilton 1856, p134). Hamilton also spoke of finding marble columns and capitals with Greek inscriptions, and said that Kufic inscriptions were also frequently found. He added that two capitals of columns in white marble, "with the Muslim profession of faith beautifully inscribed round each in raised flowered letters, were built into the side of the minbar of the Mosque which the Kehia had built" (Hamilton 1856, p.134). This Greek marble column inscribed with the Muslim profession of faith may stand, on the other column there is a reference to the Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah, one might suggest, for the continuity the town had once had with its past and for its easy acceptance of social and credal variety They are currently preserved in store at Cyrene (more detail about it in 4.3.4.2) (See Fig. 37 A&B).

Fig. 37A&B The Marble columns with Kufic inscriptions from Al Zawiyah mosque (Photo by Author)

As with other towns I have described, Barqa can be 'read' as a town continuing *in its own right*, aware of its own past, flourishing when it did so for reasons not to do with the larger political or military picture, a centre for trade as it had always been, both local and from further away, but not a pawn in the grip of North Africa and Egypt. And declining, when it finally did, for 'local' reasons, whatever they may have been.

Abdussaid and Goodchild visited Barqa to examine the outline of the city walls in 1956, that is, before the earthquake of 1963, and they could see that the modern town had been built "almost on top of the ancient city". They found, too, remains of the ditch which seemed to enclose the ancient town, and also perhaps the white marble columns described by Hamilton, though little could be read on them because they were obscured by the mihrab of the mosque (Abdussaid 1971, p.125).

We have, then, a general picture of a town that survived relatively unharmed the Arab invasion, occupying a position of political and commercial importance, we can suppose, not unlike that enjoyed by the pre-Islamic town, even though in the classical period it had begun to be overshadowed by the importance of its own seaport. The reasons for its decline are unclear, the decline noted by Arab travellers from being a prosperous and thriving urban centre to the point where only its name survived, and that in use not to indicate any urban place, but as a name for the region in general. It seems likely that the factors that already in the classical period operated to overshadow its importance by comparison with its own port of Tolmeitha, began to operate again in the post-conquest period.

As time went on in the Arab centuries, it is striking that almost no town in the Cyrenaica area was to be described as a really important urban centre in the conventional meaning of that word 'urban', of the kind found either in Egypt or in North Africa. The

movement of power and wealth between North Africa and Egypt when important travellers used the route linking Africa to Egypt, was probably of importance but precisely of passing importance for a town like Barqa. It was well situated in more general terms for the reception of 'everyday' travellers either by sea (although Tolmeitha /Tolmeitha was evidently more directly important here) or by land; its *resident* population was of mixed races and languages; there must have been much variety of culture, of goods, and of opinion to keep alive and vital a population working at all sorts of social and cultural levels with an intensity of local focus.

The 'external' flow of importance between North Africa and Egypt must have varied all the time; but one could suggest that Barqa, in common with other towns of the Cyrenaica region, had never owed its position of social energy and wealth, a position which would allow it to 'name' the region, to that 'external' flow... It gave to the region a name; it must have been sufficiently magnetic to create an 'empire' around itself; but it was never a 'great city'. It may stand for us, therefore, as the central instance of Cyrenaica's distinctively different *experiment with town life* and town flourishing. The reports of travellers in the earlier medieval period suggest energetic trading activity; but Barqa was never going to become a great centre like Alexandria or Cairo, nor is it to be thought a pity or a failure that this should be the case (See Fig. 38).
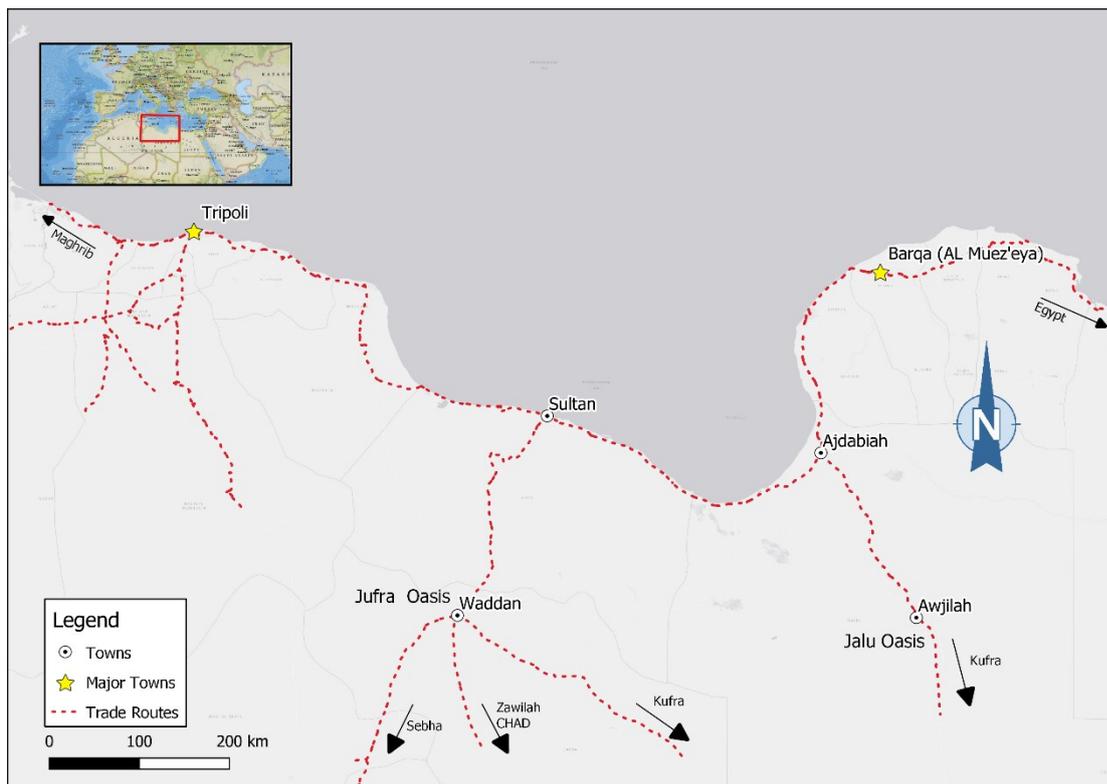
Fig. 38 A map with roads between North Africa and Egypt (after Whitehouse 1972)

What it was that caused the entire disappearance of Barqa noted by later travellers, we cannot know. What we can know is that the disappearance of the town was not the consequence of a failed bid to become Alexandria. It is not impossible that some sort of natural disaster like another earthquake finally destroyed it (see 3.1), leaving only the echo in a name of what and where the town had once been.

3.2   Development of archaeological investigation

After the visit of Abdussaid and Goodchild in 1956, a few trial trenches, described by Abdussaid 1971, p.125-126, were dug on the site, near the mosque, which suggested that an important building had stood there (See Fig. 39 A&B).
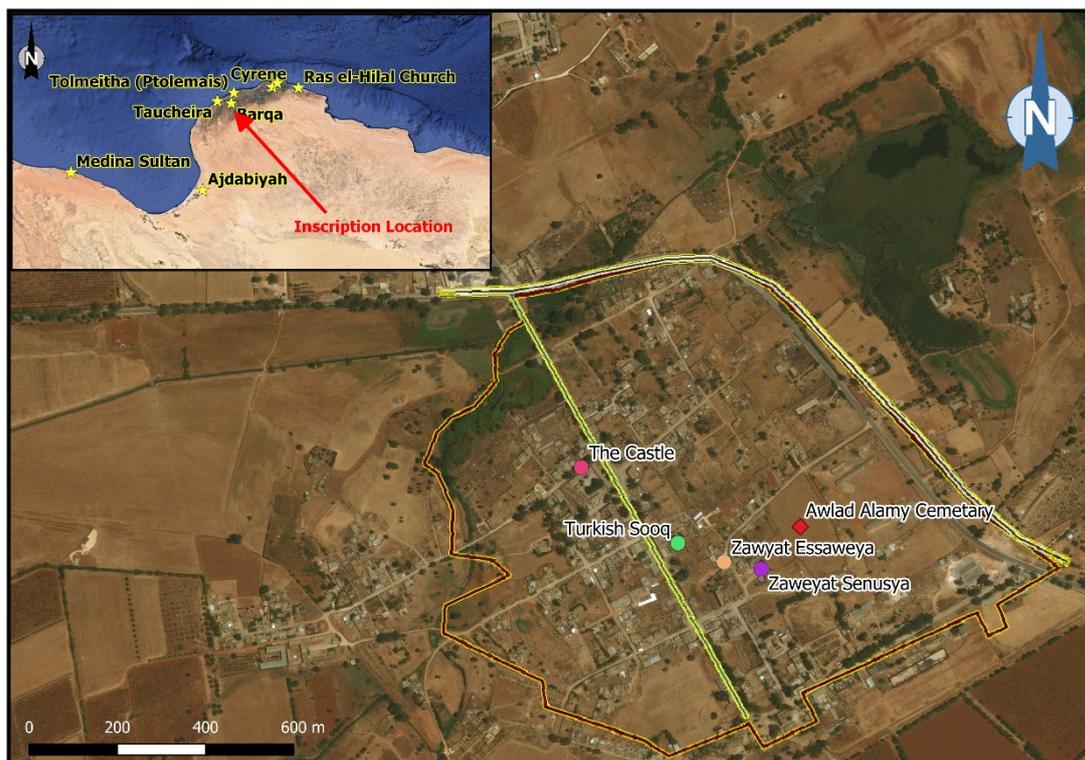
Fig. 39A The location of the El-Marj Site (by Author elaborated from Google Earth).
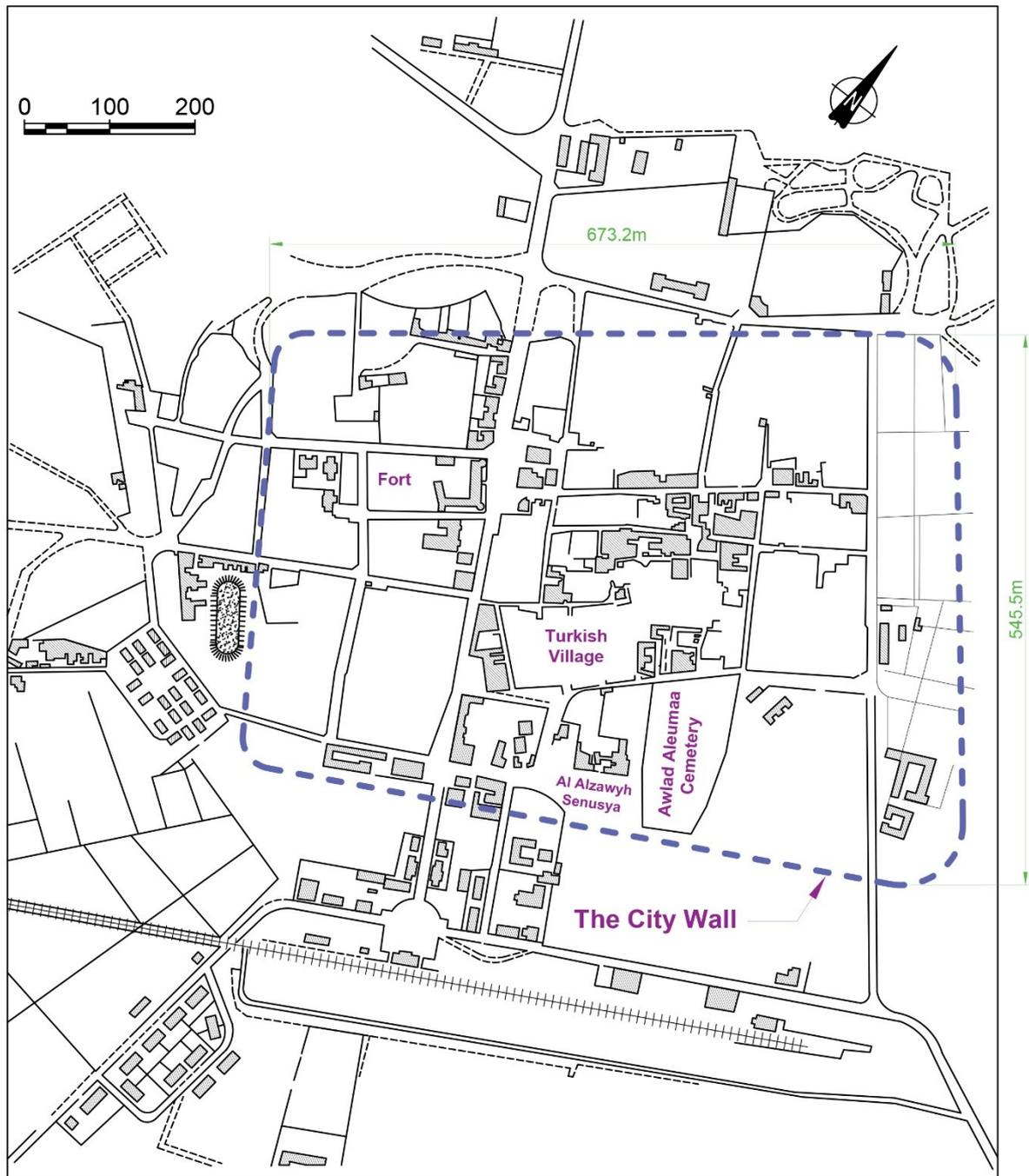
Fig. 39B General Plan of the El-Marj Site drawing by Abdulhamid Abdussaid, redrawn by Enas M. Bubtana.

After the earthquake of 1963, in which the mosque was badly damaged, it became possible to remove the two columns from the mihrab, on one of which was inscribed the profession of faith which no doubt Hamilton had seen a hundred years before

(4.1.3). The two columns were from the mihrab, The inscription on one of which was inscribed the profession of faith (the 'Shaha-Dah'); on the other column there is a reference to the Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah (mawlana al-Imam Al-Mu'izz Khalifato Allah)[31], which dates from the 4th century AH/ the 10th century CE. These inscriptions are considered among the most important inscriptions yet found in Libya of the Fatimid period (see Fig. 37 A&B).

A team directed by J.N. Dore began a fresh investigation of the site in 1989, which established that well stratified remains are to be uncovered there, dating from the classical period onwards. Reports of this investigation have been published in *Libyan Studies* and are referred to as they become relevant to the argument. Because of the earthquake and the subsequent abandonment of the site in 1963, it provides an ideal place for archaeological investigation.

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[31] Abu Tamim Ma'ad al-Mu'izz Li-Dinillah, also spelled as al-Moezz,(308AH/930 CE-353AH/975CE), the most powerful of the Fāṭimid caliphs, whose armies conquered Egypt and who made the newly founded Al-Qāhirah, or Cairo, his capital in 350CE/972CE-351AH/973CE. He was the fourth Fatimid Caliph and fourteenth Ismaili imam, and reigned from 331AH/953 CE to 353AH/975CE.

3.3   Archaeological evidence

Two buildings, whose function is not yet clear, but which are possibly related to each other, were revealed by the 1989-1990 investigations (Dore 1991, p.93). In their original phase they may be medieval, but the later phases certainly extend up to the 19th century (Dore 1991, p.95-96). Further investigation suggested that building I "wholly post-dates building II and general considerations suggest that the whole sequence should be accommodated within the Ottoman Turkish period" (Dore 1992, p.101) (See Fig. 40). A human skeleton was also found in the 1991 season, "close to the north-east corner of building I. It appears to have been buried in haste and without ceremony" (Dore 1992, p.104).
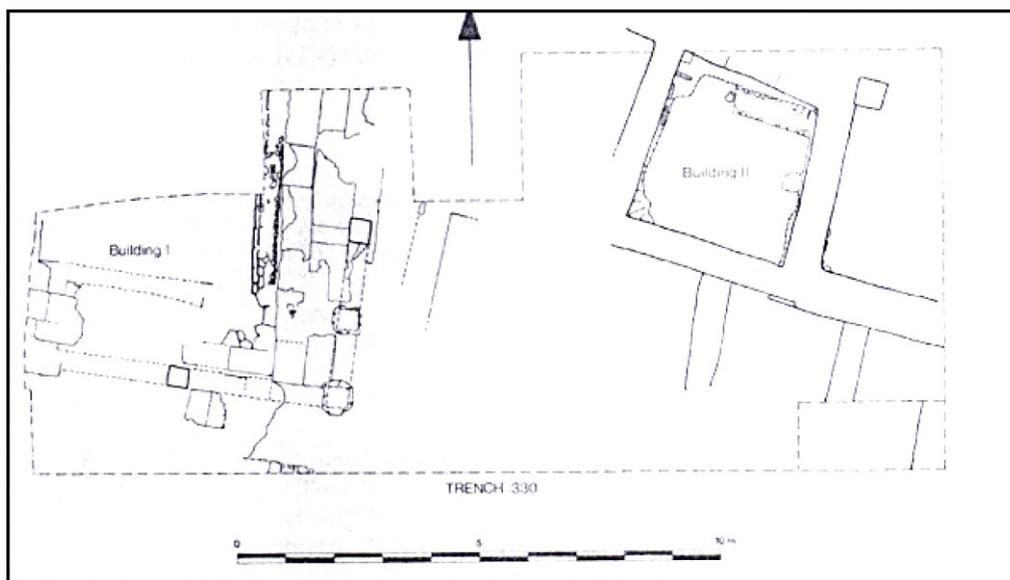

Fig. 40 Building I & II trench 330 (after Dore 1991, p.93).

The type of excavation, which concentrated on digging different sectors in small trenches made it particularly difficult to fully understand the function and the nature of these buildings. Building 2 was built in mudbrick in a phase posterior to the building one. Both the structures have been dated to the Ottoman period (Dore 1994). In trench 330 evidence of pottery dated to the 10th -11th century has been recorded. The

structures excavated in this area, near the fort do not seem to indicate the presence of important constructions, but rather poor constructions in mudbrick.

3.3.1 Forts

What James Hamilton described as "the Turkish castle", built the year before he visited Barqa in the mid-19th century, he saw had been constructed "on the site of the ancient citadel" and built "of ancient materials dug up on the spot" (Hamilton 1856, p.134). This castle was entirely destroyed in the earthquake of 1963 (Abdussaid 1971, p.123, n.5). The present supposition (personal communication from Khaled Elhadder) is that the "ancient citadel" at Barqa was much like the *qasr* at Ajdabiyah (5.3.1); but much more work at this spot is needed to demonstrate this. Even though ibn Said (3.1) mistakenly says that the town was destroyed by the Arab invasion, the presence of a town at this location, well situated on the major routes through Cyrenaica, might have ensured, one supposes, that a *qasr* of the kind at Ajdabiyah would have been felt appropriate and necessary (5.3.1), unless the fort of Ajdabiyah was built at a later date, when Barqa had already lost its role and function, becoming a lesser important centre and Tolmeitha had acquired more importance.

There is more to be said on this matter. Even though we have no evidence on the ground, an argument that points to the probability of a qasr in Barqa can be put together. The historical sources are a reference to the existence of this palace in the city of Barqa and known this place as the Palace of Muezaya, Ibn Dinar notes the stay in his book , saying that Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah "...left Al-Mu'izz from Gabes (361AH/983CE), and entered Tripoli, and departed for Tripoli, on the way to Sirte ......, and left Sirte and descended to his palace which was built in Ajdabiyah, then he departed from Ajdabiyah and descended to his palace known as Al Muezaya   in Barqa , until he reached Alexandria ... " (Ib-Dinar 1967, p.62, author's translation;

Arabic Appendix, passage 22) means the second qaṣr was situated inside or outside the city of Barqa, and there some inscription on one of them, inscribed with the name of Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah, maybe from this palace.

3.3.2 The mosque

The mosque, though severely damaged in the earthquake of 1963, still stands. It was described by various visitors in the past as incorporating ancient, pre-Islamic capitals and columns reused; but there has been as yet no further investigation of the building. There seem to be grounds at the moment for suggesting that this building was rather less than a fully developed mosque, more just a place to say one's prayers. This hypothesis cannot be entirely ruled out, if Barqa was the first important provincial centre and the initial place for prayer was rather small, as there had been no time to build a grand mosque. Later other sites as Sirte and Ajdabiyah became more important and monumentalised, while Barqa lost its role in favour of them, and monumental complexes were never built in the city. For example, Al-Y'akubi in the middle of the 9th century speaks of 'a Friday mosque' at a town called Ajiyah (as yet unidentified) six miles away on the coast (3.1.3 – Dore 1994), but no mediaeval traveller mentions one in Barqa itself. Was Ajiyah the local religious centre? The location of Ajiyah is not identified, but perhaps Tolmeitha and Ajiyah, located along the coast, became more important centres.

However, a great deal of archaeological work would have to be done on the site before one could conclude with reasonable certainty that the mosque that still stands was all there ever was. It is true that, very often, a later mosque will be built on the site of a previous one (and we see that, for instance, at Ajdabiyah), so that there may lie beneath the building that can be seen other layers revealing an earlier construction.

However, the earlier construction would be almost bound to be simpler, so that the puzzlingly unelaborated architecture of the visible mosque still needs explaining. Barqa was, after all, in its day a thriving and important place. Perhaps there was a mosque on another site in the town? Or perhaps this one functioned as a kind of chapel, dependent on the Ajiyah Friday mosque?

The Alzawyh mosque in Barqa, which was badly damaged in the earthquake of 1963, had two columns removed from the mihrab, on one of which was inscribed the profession of faith, the 'Shaha-Dah', on the other a reference to the Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah (mawlana al-Imam Al-Muiz Khalifato Allah – Dore 1994) (see 3.3.4.2 No 11). In my visit to the site in December 2016, I was able to notice that in the corridors of Al Alzawyh mosque, there are different forms of column, some of them marble (See Fig. 41 A&B). Outside the mosque, at the entrance, there was a spoil heap of marble fragments of about one metre in width and at its side the base of a marble column. All the marble materials accumulated there, near the mosque, seems to suggest the presence of a greater monument, built with reused materials, which was probably destroyed in 1963 (see Fig. 42 A, B&C).

Fig. 41A&B Al Alzawyh mosque (Photo by Author)

Fig. 42 A, B & C Al Alzawyh mosque (Photo by Author)

3.3.3 Pottery

Substantial quantities of pottery have already been recovered, Greek (4th century BCE), early Roman, medieval Islamic and modern, in a well stratified sequence (Dore 1991, p.91). The majority of the finds are dated from the medieval Islamic period, the 10th century onwards, though "the absence of any pottery datable to the 7th to 9th century may simply be due to our inability to recognise it", with a steady presence of classical and Hellenistic Greek, but rather less from the Roman and Byzantine periods. The possibility is that the pottery recovered from this site will help substantially the working out of a fully detailed and dated typology for the pottery of the whole region. The positioning of Barqa on major trade routes by which pottery and other goods circulated makes it of major importance for the more precise description of the movement of pottery to and from Egypt, Sicily, and Tunisia (Dore 1991, p.105)

3.3.4 Coins and inscriptions

As well as yielding important quantities of pottery and coins, the site of Barqa is relatively rich in inscriptions. This to some extent compensates for the lack, for one reason or another, of evidence provided by excavated buildings.

3.3.4.1 Coins

A hoard of 40 gold coins was found in Barqa by Italian investigators in 1936 (Abdussaid 1971, p.124). These coins were stored together with other coins discovered by Italian archaeologists at named sites in Eastern Libya, such as Cyrene and Benghazi, and with others whose provenance was not noted. The whole collection was transferred to Italy in 1940.

It remained in Italy until R.G. Goodchild, who was at the time Head of Antiquities in the eastern region of Libya, came to know of the collection, and sought to have it returned

to the care of the Libyan state.[32] Twenty-three further coins were recovered from the site in the 1990 season of excavation, all of them copper alloy or nickel. Two of the coins which are legible seem to be datable to either the Abbasid or Fatimid periods; one further legible coin dates from the mid-19th century (Dore 1991, p.97).

A dirham preserved in the British Museum suggests that there might have been some actual coinage of money in Barqa (Hardy-Guilbert 2010, p.87).

Looking at the Ummayad period there is no evidence that the city of Barqa minted its own coinage prior to the governor Abd 'Al Malik. Barqa does not seem to have its own mint. It is in fact in the post reform fals, that we see the appearance of coinage actually minted at Barqa. Fals, dirām and half dinars struck in Barqa are recorded in the Abbassid period. After this moment, and especially after the Fatimid conquest, there does not seem to have been coinage struck in Barqa, this suggesting that probably already in the 9th century the city had lost importance in favour of other settlements like Ajdabiyah and Tolmeitha. These coins were found in Syria and Cordoba, suggesting that in this earlier phase Barqa had a key commercial role[33] (see Fig. 43 to 53).

Fig. 43 Umayyad post-reform fals, around 90/710.

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[32] The coin collection was returned to Libya in 1961, and deposited in the Libyan National Bank (now the National Commercial Bank), for fear that such important and valuable items should be lost or stolen. The deposit was divided into two groups in the bank, the one of lesser importance placed in the Cyrene office, and the more important holding in the Benghazi office. There seems, however, now to be no record of this arrangement, nor of any other ancient coins held in the Cyrene and Benghazi offices. It seems clear that the hoard returned from Italy in 1961 was looted from the National Commercial Bank during the February 2011 revolution.

[33] For a detailed discussion and more bibliography see Bauden 2017.

Fig. 44 Umayyad post-reform fals, in the name of ʿAbd al-Malik, Barqa, around 100/720

Fig. 45 Umayyad post-reform fals, in the name of ʿUbayd Allāh b. Bišr/Busr, Barqa, after 100/720.

Fig. 46 Umayyad post-reform fals, Barqa, around 120/738.

Fig. 47 Umayyad post-reform fals, in the name of Abū Naṣr, Anṭābulus, and Barqa, around 132/750.

Fig. 48 Fals of Abū al-Ḫaṭṭāb ʿAbd al-Aʿlā b. Samḥ al-Maʿāfirī (r. 140-143/757-761) (?), Barqa.

Fig. 49 Fals struck during the reign of caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136-158/754-775) by Yazīd b. Ḥātim b. Qabīṣa al-Muhallabī (governor of Ifrīqiyya, 154-170/771-787), Barqa, 158/774-775.

Fig. 50 Dirham in the name of caliph al-Hādī (r. 169-170/785-786) with Hārūn as heir, Ifrīqiyya with Barqa (?), 170/785-786.

Fig. 51 Half dirham struck during the reign of caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 189-218/813-833), by governor Ṭāhir, Barqa, 211/826-827.

Fig. 52 Fals in the name of caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 232-247/847-861), with governor Ǧaʿfar and finance director Saʿd, Barqa, 240/854-855.

Fig. 53 Fals in the name of caliph al-Muntaṣir (r. 247-248/861-863) with governor Maḥmūd b. al-Rabīʿ, 247/861-862.

3.3.4.2 Inscriptions

The inscriptions presented here have all been re-examined by the present writer, and all drawings of inscriptions are the work of the present writer. Where there are no drawings, it is because the condition of the stone made detailed drawing impossible. Chief among the inscriptions at Barqa must probably be the profession of faith already described in 3.1.3 and 3.2 (see Inscription 11 and also the general introduction to inscriptions in 1.7). These inscriptions will first be presented here one by one. Inscriptions 1-9 are grave headstones; the remainder are commemorative inscriptions.

Inscription 1:

A presentation of the inscription:

The first of the fragments is gravestone of a semi-circular shape found at in the Awlad Aleumaa Cemetery in el-Merj al-Qadim[34] [Barqa]. The writer has been able to examine this briefly, and it was taken Taucheira (ie. Tocra) for proper photographing and preliminary investigation (see Fig. 54 A&B).

Measures: The maximum height of the stone is 12 cm and the width of 20 cm and a thickness of 5 cm. The size of the gravestone is small. It may have been placed on grave of child.

Analysis: The gravestone is written in a simple Kufic script without the diacritic signs which might suggest for it a later date, crafted with the relief letter style on sandstone. The gravestone has three lines of lettering. There is no name of the dead person or the date of his or her death. Headstones in softer materials like sandstone would be more often in relief (which involves a good deal of cutting away of stone), and those in marble more likely to be incised.

 The Text and Translation:

1. there is no Allah only Allah

2. Muhammad [sic] of Allah the Messenger[sic] of [Allah]

3. Pray [sic] of Allah be upon him.

١. لا اله الا الله

٢. محمد [كذا] رسو [كذا] [الله]

٣. صل[كذا] الله عليه وسلم

Chronology: The date of the gravestone is somewhere within the first three centuries AH of the Islamic settlement of Cyrenaica. This dating is based on the style of writing, which can be compared with an inscription found on a tombstone kept in the Islamic

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[34] The cemetery was Turkish originally, but certainly on the site of an earlier burial site, as is evidenced by the kinds of stone found there**.**

Museum in Cairo. The Cairo stone bears the number 2721/377 and it is dated 272AH/894CE (Gaston 1936, vol. IV. pl. 1, no. 1201, p.355).
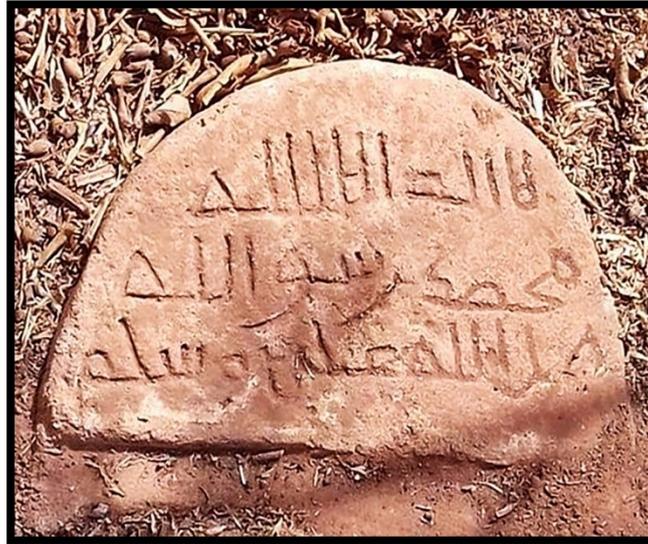

Fig. 54A&B Inscription 1 (Photo by Author).

Inscription 2

A presentation of the inscription:

On the other side of the same fragment (inscription 1) is an inscription using diacritic signs. The two inscriptions are presumably from approximately the same period, which would seem to place the whole fragment in the later part of the 9th century, provided that one supposes that the piece of material has not been used and reused over a longer period of time. It could also be that a later engraver has deliberately used an earlier style of lettering in order to imitate the already engraved side of the stone he is using (see Fig. 55 A&B).

Analysis: This side of the gravestone is written again in a simple Kufic script but with diacritic signs and incised on the sandstone. This side of the gravestone has five lines of lettering. The burial of a woman is recorded here, as we see from the name and the feminine pronoun.

Chronology: The chronology is based on the style of writing which can be compared with an inscription found on a tombstone kept in the Islamic Museum in Cairo.

 The Text and Translation:

1. This is the grave of Said

2. Qismaan Bin Mohammed

3. On her…. alaithnyn (Monday)………….?

4. ……. ? But for the good of the

5. …..Allayl[sic] (night)

1. هذا قبر سيد

2. قسما بن محمد

3. فيها [كذا] الاثنين....ازمنو الا...........؟

رحلت

4. ....؟ رثحلى ولكن لخير مع [كذا]
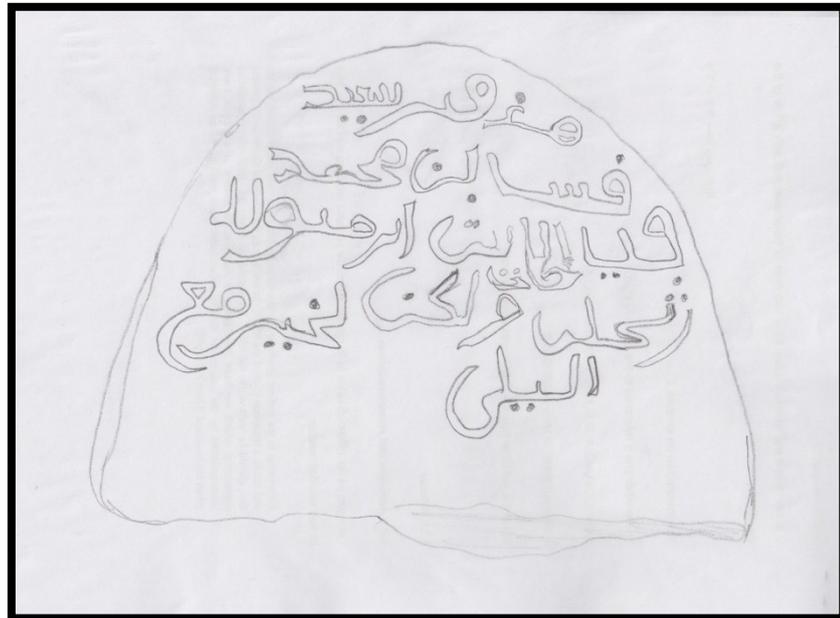
5. .....اليل] كذا]

Fig. 55A&B Inscription 2 (Photo by Author)

Inscription 3

A presentation of the inscription:

This headstone was found in the city of el-Merj, and is currently preserved in Tolmeitha Museum. It is on sandstone and complete, and from el-Merj (Barqa), oblong in shape (54cm x 30cm x 8cm). However, wear and weathering have affected some of the letters, because of the softness of sandstone (see Fig. 56).

Analysis: The gravestone has five lines. The whole text is present, with the name of the dead person but no date of his death. It is inscribed in incised Kufic script, with almost no decoration of any sort.

The Text and Translation:

1. Bism Allah the Most Gracious the Most Merciful

2. Abd Allah bin Abd

3. El Salam died and who testifies

4. that there is no Allah but allah alone

5. without partner and that Muhammed

6. is his servant and prophet,

7. Pray [sic] of Allah be upon him.

8. have mercy on him and forgive him

<div dir="rtl">

1. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

2. مات عبدالله بن عبد

3. السلام وهو يشهد

4. ان لا اله الا الله وحده

5. لا شريك له وان محمد

6. عبده ورسوله

7. صلى الله عليه وسلم

</div>

8.ورحمه وغفر له.

Notes on the inscription:

We do not find on the headstone the date of the death of the person commemorated, Abd Allah bin el Salam, and this is rare. I do not know the reason for this omission but it can be noted that there is a large space at the end of the lines of writing which is empty, and possibly the writer intended to write the date of death in there. Instead of that we find he broke off two of the lines of script and drew between them seven circles. I cannot explain this except that as some kind of minimal decorative embellishment. From the style of writing of the headstone and by the comparing it with other headstones which represent datable stages in the development of writing on stone, we can say that the date of this headstone is somewhere in the 2nd century AH (8th century CE).

Fig. 56 Inscription 3 (Photo by Author)

Inscription 4

A presentation of the inscription:

This headstone was found in the city of el-Marj, and is currently preserved in Tolmeitha Museum. The gravestone is written in Kufic letters ending in triangular flourishes (i.e. letters with triangular decoration at the end, one of several different Kufic styles distinguished by scholars: triangular, coarse, geometric, simple, etc.) (see Fig. 57 A&B).

Analysis: This headstone is engraved in incised characters on a square piece of limestone (stone local to el-Merj and a harder material than sandstone, and so more likely to receive incised script). The surviving piece was part of a larger whole, which can be fairly securely reconstructed as containing prayers and the name of the deceased. The date in line 7 was found on one of the separate broken pieces. In order to read the text correctly and understand its meaning, we have tried to read the headstone and supply what is missing in the light of other evidence from the same period and with the help of the work of other researchers. Sulaiman Bell Hajj in particular has studied some of these Islamic gravestones in Barqa, which date back to an early period, most of which are written in Kufic Script (Hajj 1968, p.13; Bubtana 2007, pp.36-37)

The headstone originally contained seven lines. The fourth and fifth lines are lost because of a break at the middle of the stone; but the religious content of them can be fairly securely surmised. The missing part extended to include perhaps the name of the deceased and prayers for forgiveness and religious invocations for him.

The Text and Translation:

1. [Bism Allah] the Most Gracious the Most Merciful

enlightens [sic]

2. of the heavens and the earth, the light of the grave of [....]

3. ....] testifies that there [is no Allah]

4.[but Allah alone with no partner]

5. [and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah]

6. Pray [sic] of Allah be upon him, died

7. in thirty-nine and two [hundred]

1 ـ [بسم اللـه] الرحمن الرحيم ينور [كذا]

2 ـ السموات و] الارض نور قبر [....]

3 ـ .... يشهد ا [ن لا اله]

4 ـ [الا اللـه وحده لا شريك له]

5 ـ [وأن محمد رسول اللـه]

6 ـ صل [كذا] اللـه عليه وسلم توفى

7 ـ فى سنه تسع وثلاثين و [ما] ئتين

Notes on the inscription: The script is similar to that of the headstone found in Taurguni which dated from 239 AH/853 CE. The distinguishing features are: decorated endings especially to the letters Alif, lams and others; the writing is level and in a single format and size. Sometimes a letter is ignored or forgotten when a

reader would certainly understand what was meant (and perhaps when space was difficult), eg. the Alif letter in the word [Aanor = enlightens] contained in the first line of this headstone. This is a style of abbreviation probably deliberately imitated from the habitual abbreviation in the script of the Koran (so-called Nabatiyeh).

Fig. 57A&B Inscription 4 (after Bubtana 2007, pl.5)

Inscription 5

A presentation of the inscription:

This headstone was found in the city of el-Marj, and is currently preserved in Tolmeitha Museum. The gravestone is written in a foliated Kufic script as some letters end with bilobate leaves. The writing is in relief letter script on a pure white marble rectangular slab measuring 80 cm × 58 cm × 9 cm (see Fig. 58 A&B).

Analysis: This gravestone contains thirteen lines. The whole text is present. Despite the damage inflicted on the lower left-hand side at the bottom, which has resulted in letter loss, one can very securely supply the tiny piece of 'technically' missing text. There is also some damage to the decorative ribbon at the bottom. The headstone bears the name of the deceased and is dated 254 AH / 868 CE.

The Text and Translation: (although some lines are still difficult)

1. Bism Allah the Most Gracious the Most Merciful

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2. the god-fearing take heed of the admonishments of God since in

3. their compliance is attainment; they have said the words and have grown strong in the attainments

4. of the recompense of God and they have valued (them)

5. of the apostle of God, may God bless him and deliver him

6. and they were patient and God had mercy

7. may God be satisfied with my work in my life to please him

8. Mohammed bin Nadir affirms himself as a believer

9. in God in his singularity in the seat of divinity, everlasting,

10. a worshipper of God the righteous and a follower

11.

12. he died in Jamada al-THaany in the year of 254AH[m]

13. iayatayn

1 ـ بسم اللـه الرحمن الرحيم

2 ـ ان المتقين المتعظين بمواعظ اللـه إذ بلـ

3 ـ ينهم بمصيبه استرجعوا وفكروا فى

4 ـ ثواب اللـه فقدروا وتعزوا بالمصيبه بر

5 ـ سول اللـه صل [كذا] الله عليه وسلم

6 ـ فصبروا فرحم اللـه امرئ نظر لنفسه

7 ـ فعمل ليوم معاده فالحمد اللـه رضا [كذا]

8 ـ بقضايه وان محمد بن نادر يشهد

9 ـ للـه بالوحدانيه مقراً له بالربوبية متعبـ

10 ـ داً للـه القائم لازماً للـه الدايم لا يعا

11 ـ دله الذى استأثر بالخلود وقضا [كذا] بالموت على جميع

12 ـ خلقه توفى في جمادى الاخر سنه اربع وخمسين و [ما]

Notes on the inscription:

The gravestone is dated to the year 254 AH / 868 CE and the writing is enclosed by a decorated band on all four sides, in the form of grains of wheat. The writer has used leaf-shaped decoration in this decorated border of precisely the same form as we find on the ends of the letters of the words; we see it in particular at the end of the letters Alif, Nun, Ra'iy, Dal and with some others. This kind of Kufic decoration is well known in different parts of the Islamic world, the oldest examples of it dating to the third century CE (Bubtana 2007, pp.39-40)

On this gravestone we find some of the words divided between two lines, for example bilaina بليناهم , birasul برسول, mut'abadan متعبدا. The writer also divided the century part of the date at the end of the final line, where we find the word wa-mi'ataini ومائيتين split into two parts, the first at the end of the final line and the reminder (ataini) نتين under the beginning of the date in the final line, that is under جمادي(jumaeda). The reason for this appears to have been the lack of space at the end of the final line, and suggests that the sculptor had enclosed the space to be written in with the decorative band before starting the writing. The particular prayers and religious formulae on the gravestone are very unusual, not repeated in any other examples I have seen in other Islamic cities in Cyrenaica.

The quality of the stone is excellent, the writing is highly decorated, beautifully clear and regular; and it seems plain that the craftsman planned out the shape of his work before he began. All this suggests that this inscription was for a rich and important person.
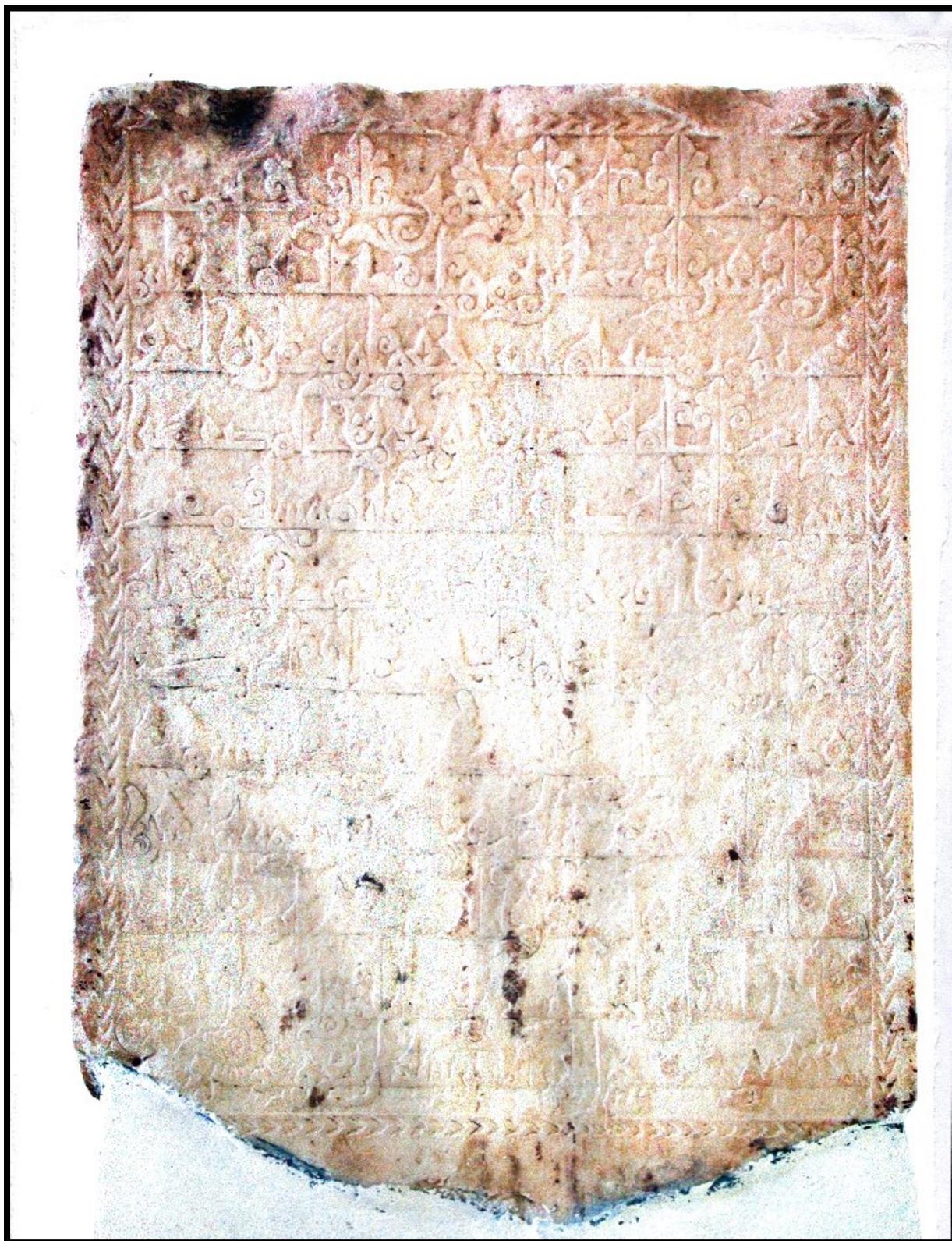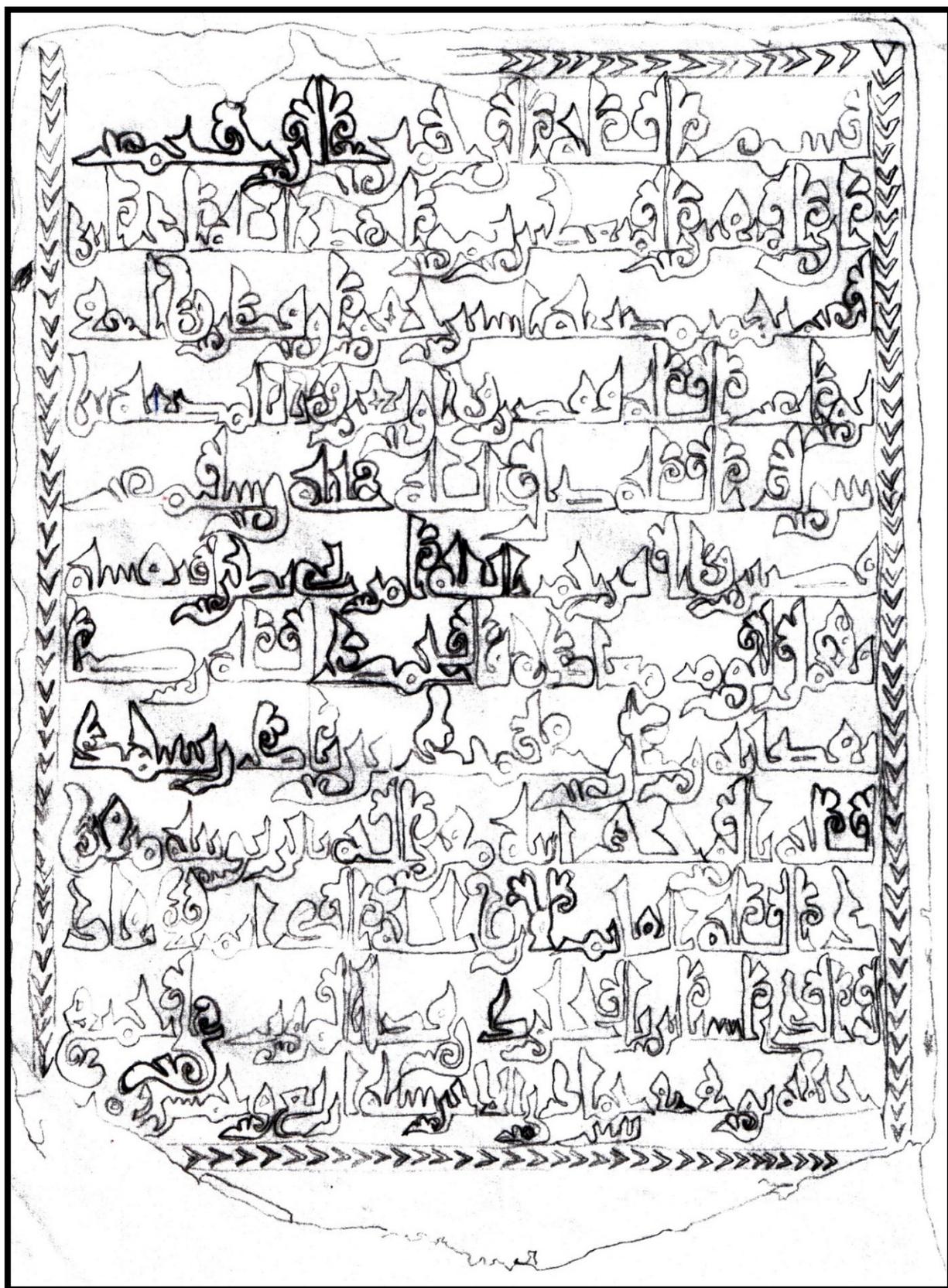
Fig. 58A Inscription 5 (after Bubtana 2007, pl.7)

Fig. 58B Inscription 5 (after Bubtana 2007, pl.7).

Inscription 6

A presentation of the inscription:

This headstone was found in the city of el-Marj, and is currently preserved in Tolmeitha Museum. The gravestone is written with a foliated Kufic as some letters ends with bilobate leaves. The writing is in relief letter script on a piece of limestone on the semi-circular. The maximum height of the slab is 80 cm and the width more than 58 cm and a thickness of 9 cm (see Fig. 59 A&B).

The gravestone had five lines. The whole text is present but there is no name of the dead person or the date of his or her death.

The Text and Translation:

1. Bism Allah the

2. Most Gracious the Most Merciful Praise be to Allah

3. Praise be to Allah[sic], Lord of all creation and There is no power or strength save in Allah

4. Almighty God and All Prayers[sic] of Allah be upon him

5. on the Seal of the Prophets Muhammad and the prophets [sic] of Allah and blessings.

١ . بسم الله الر

٢ . حمن الرحيم والحمد لله ر

٣ . ب العلمين [كذا] ولا حول ولا قوه إلا

٤ . بالله العظيم وصل [كذا] الله على محمد

٥ . خاتم النبيين وعلى انبياه [كذا] وسلم .

Notes on the inscription:

There is no name of the dead person or the date of his or her death. The writing is level and in a single format and size. The gravestone is written in a foliated Kufic script as some letters end with bilobate leaves and other letters are decorated with leaves representing half-fan palms. The writing is confined within a decorative frame that looks like a rosary and some of the lines include some simple geometric shapes such as circles while there can be observed some other floral motifs.

The writer follows Nabati's method in distributing the word on two lines, as in the word [Rahman] between the second line and the word [Rebbe]ربي between the second lines and third; as well as in the presence of protrusion caused ⊙Alif ended prominent on the level of flatness is noted in a speech [khatm] خاتم in the fifth line, We also note that influence in Central negligence related to the ⊙Alif ended with a letter before, as in the words[Rahman] والرحمان and [alealamin]العالمين in the second and third lines.

As for headstone the researcher dated it to the 3rd century AH building on the existence of written and decorative common elements. The characters of the headstone are similar to the characters of headstone (248 AH) preserved in Al ssaraya Alhamra Museum in Tripoli and also the headstone No 5 (254 AH), particularly the shape of Haa', Ayn, Kaf, Haa, and Khaa letters, as well as in decoration of the kashida (Arabic Tatweel or Arabic hyphen-like glyph): the first was lobate as in a tri-leaf, and the second is a simple arc form (Bubtana 2007, pp.42-43).
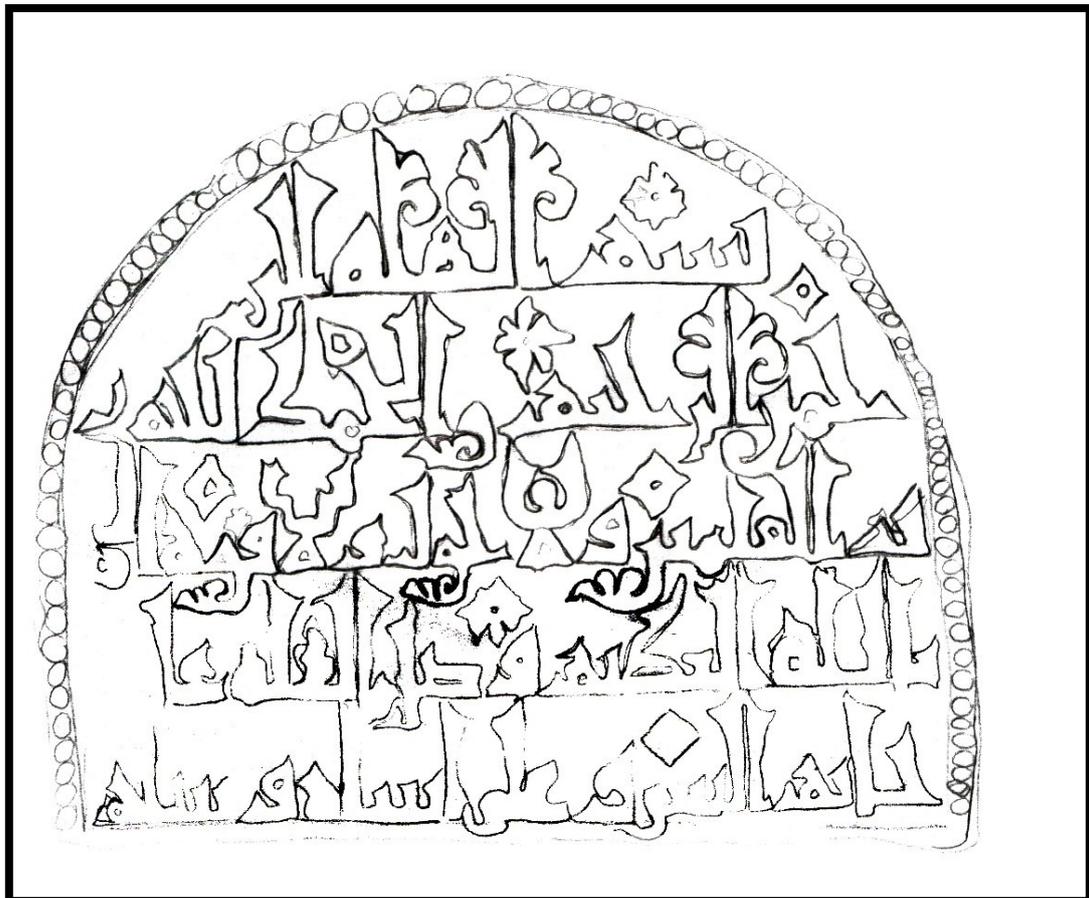
Fig. 59A&B Inscription 6 (after Bubtana 2007, pl.8)

Inscription 7

A presentation of the inscription:

There is a group of broken headstones currently preserved in Tolmeitha Museum, of which one of them is this headstone. It is made from the sandstone, with the maximum height being 45 cm, the width more than 35 cm (broken) and a thickness of it 5 cm. It is written in raised Kufic script, the ends of the letters occasionally decorated with half leaves (see Fig. 60 A&B).

The gravestone is distinguished from the previous ones in that it mentions on it the place of the owner's death, this was in Barqa (el-Merj) however, we do not find the complete date because the headstone was broken and the century part of the date was on the part which is lost.

This gravestone originally contained seven lines; the first line is lost because of a break at the top from both sides, therefore six lines of text remained. Also the break included the first half on both sides of the second line. Perhaps it featured the second name of the deceased and the century part of the date. I am confident that the first line contained the Basmallah [In the name of God the Most Gracious the Most Merciful].

The Text and Translation:

1.[Bism Allah the Most Gracious the Most Merciful].

2.[the headstone….] Ahmed

3. Al-Makhzoumi Al-Quraishi [Forgive him] [sic]

4. and gathered him with his righteous fathers.

5.he died in Barqa in Jamada [Al-Awwa or al-Thaany]

6.of the year Two and Eighty [and hundred or two hundred] 182 or 282.

7. may Allah's mercy be upon [him].

١. [بسم اللـه الرحمن الرحيم].

2. [هذا قبر ...] احمد [ابن......]-.

3.المخزومي القريشي [اللهم اغفر له وارحمه].

4.وجمـ[ـعـ]ـه بأبائه الصالحـ[ـين].

5.وفاته ببرقة في جما[دي] [الاول او الآخر]

6. من سنه ثنتين وثمنين [ومائة او مائتين].

7. [ر]حمه الله [عليه].

Notes on the inscription:

It seems that the writing was confined within a decorative frame that looks like a rosary consisting of joined up parts. This is the first time in a headstone from Cyrenaica that there is mention of the place of death in Barqa. We also note the existence of the deceased's family surname Al-Makhzoumi[35] Al-Quraishi[36] and this is evidence that the dead man was of Arab origin from the tribe of Quraish in the Hijaz. Perhaps these Arab tribes came with the conquering Arabs and settled in Barqa. The headstone was broken and the century part of the date was on the part which is lost. As to whether the date is 182 AH or 282 AH, the likelihood is that is later since we note that the headstone is written in raised Kufic script and the ends of the letters and the frame surrounding the text are decorated. This is very common in the 3rd century AH / 9th century CE as can be compared with a headstone from 248 AH/ 862 CE preserved in Al ssaraya Alhamra Museum in Tripoli (Bubtana 2007, pp.37-38). The characters of the headstone are similar to the characters of headstone (248 AH/ 862 CE),

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[35] Banū Makhzūm (Arabic: بنو مخزوم) was one of the wealthy clans of Quraysh, the Arab tribe of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. They are regarded as one of three most powerful and influential Tribes in Mecca before the advent of Islam, the other two being Banu Hashim and Banu Umayya Members of this clan still live in present-day Saudi Arabia and Syria.

[36] The Quraysh (Arabic: قريش) were a mercantile tribe that historically inhabited and controlled Mecca and its Ka'aba. The Islamic prophet Muhammad was born into the Banu Hashim clan of the Quraysh tribe. The Quraysh staunchly opposed Muhammad until converting to Islam en masse in 630 CE. Afterward, leadership of the Muslim community traditionally passed to a member of the Quraysh as was the case with the Rashidun, Umayyad, and Abbasid caliphs.

particularly the shape of Haa', Ayn, Kaf, Haa, and Khaa letters, as well as in the decoration of the kashida.
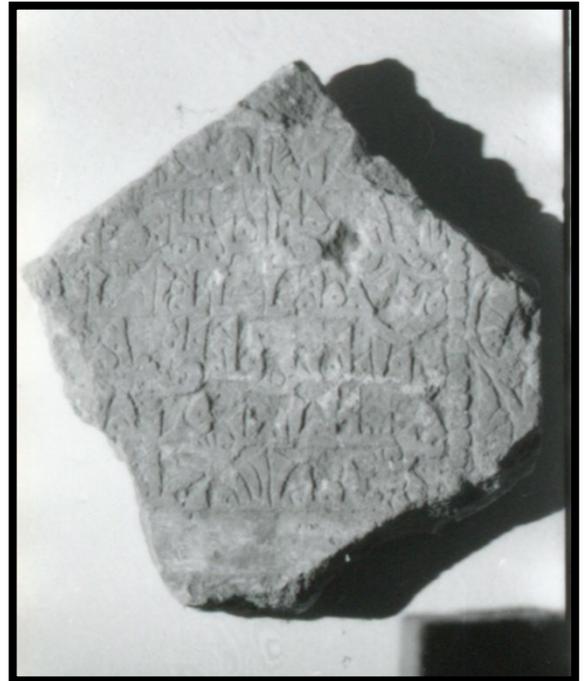

Fig. 60A&B Inscription 7 (Photo by Author)

Inscription 8

A presentation of the inscription:

This headstone was found in the city of el-Marj, and is currently preserved in Tolmeitha Museum. The gravestone is broken into five pieces, and there are also some pieces lost. It is oblong in shape, with the maximum height being 45 cm and the width of around 35 cm and a thickness of 9 cm (see Fig. 61). This gravestone originally contains eight lines; the first two lines are lost because of a break at the top of the headstone. It is written in raised Kufic script, the ends of the letters occasionally decorated with half leaves. On one of its sides appears a band of decoration like the one which we saw on headstone 254 AH/868 CE. The text of the headstone reads:

The Text and Translation:

1.[Bism Allah] the Most Gracious

2. [the Most Merciful] light of the skies

3.and of the earth, light of the grave.

4.Halsa daughter of Muhammed bin Al Na'is

5. she died and she sees that

6. there is no Allah but Allah

7.alone and he has no partren [and that]

8.Muhamed is has servant [and] his prophet.

<div dir="rtl">

1.[بسم اللـه] الرحمن

2.[الرحيم] يانور السمو

3. .[ات] والارض نور قبر

4.حلسا ابنت محمد بن الناعسي تو

5.فيت و [هي] تشهد [ان]

</div>

6.الا اله الا الله

7.وحده لا شريك له [وان]

8. محمداً عبده [و] رسول [له] .

Notes on the inscription:

We note that this headstone carries the name of a female, Halsa daughter of Muhammed, and the headstone is undated. However, we think that it is possible that the headstone of Halsa daughter of Muhammed dates to the 3rd century AH like the headstone No 7 (182 AH / 798 CE or 282AH / 895 CE) in view of the raised script, the decoration, the leafy form of the decoration of the ends of the letters whose lobes are twisted, and the band found on one side which we have seen on headstone No 5 (254 AH / 868 CE).
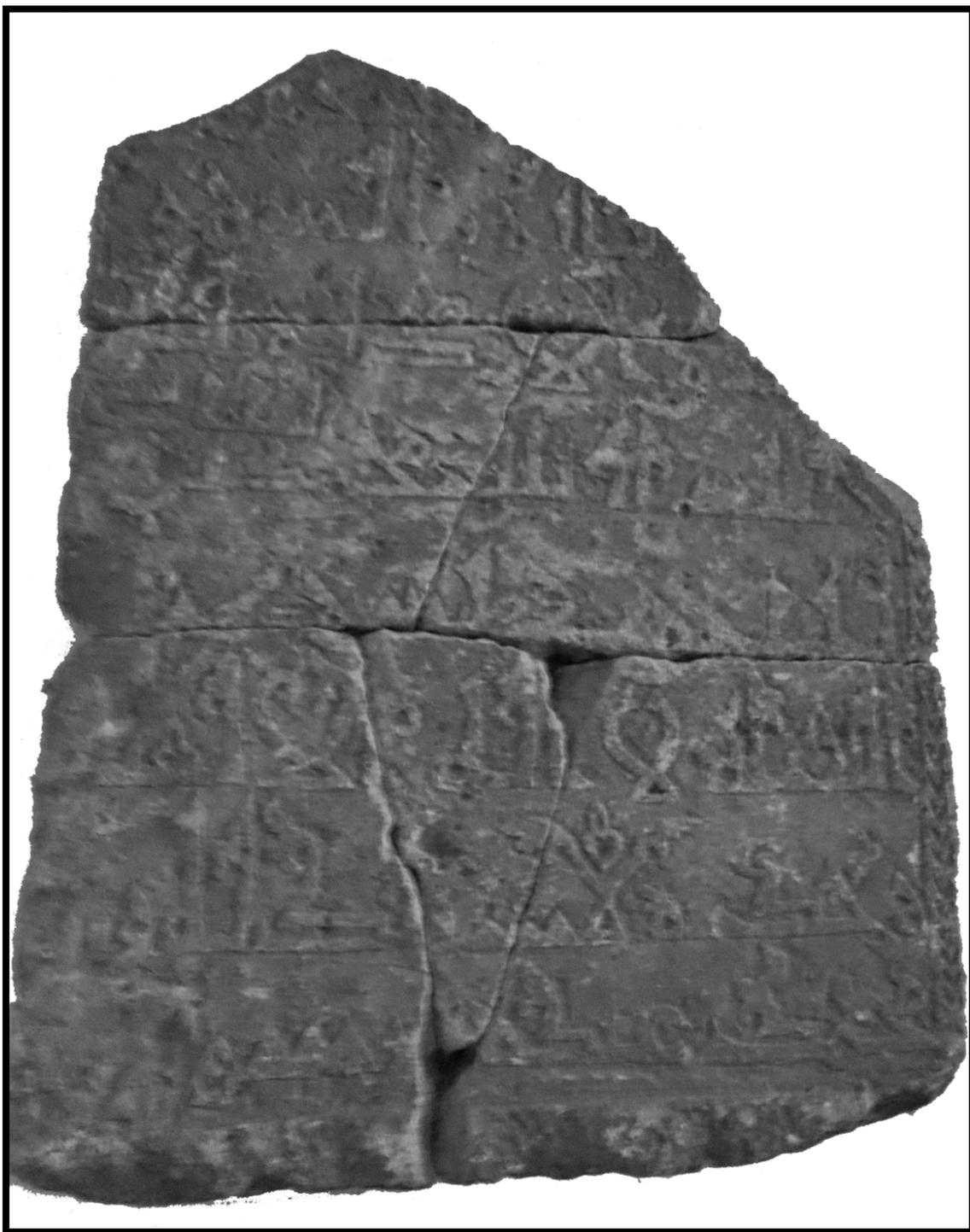
Fig. 61 Inscription 8 (Photo by Author)

Inscription 9

A presentation of the inscription:

Also from the group which was found in el-Merj (Barqa), and is currently preserved in Tolmeitha Museum is a fragment of a headstone on which are two lines which contain the bismillah and, perhaps, the name of the dead person. The fragment is small (60 cm x 35 cm) (see Fig. 62 A&B), but suffices to show the importance of the owner of the grave and his affairs; this is explained by the meticulous care taken with the writing and its arrangement. The fragment reads as follows:

The Text and Translation:

1. Bism Allah the Most Gracious the Most Merciful

2.this is the grave of Tahir bin 'Alwan

3.Abdallah .... (?)

1.بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

2. هذا قبر طاهر بن علوان

3. عبالله ....؟

Notes on the inscription:

The headstone is made of marble and inscribed in sunken Kufic, somewhat floriated. We find it here in an early form of the style. In addition to the decoration which we can see emanating from the tips of the letters in the form of branches or leaves, whole or half, we find that the writer has undertaken to use vegetable decoration consisting of leaves, branches and flower buds to connect the writing or rather to separate it. The headstone is made of marble and inscribed in sunken Kufic, somewhat floriated. We

find it here in an early form of the style. In addition, there is decoration emanating from the tips of the letters in the form of branches or leaves, whole or half. The way the writing was inscribed and the decoration which surrounds it are distinguished by their meticulousness and scope. The excellence of the arrangement, the quality of the decorative elements and their simplicity, suggests therefore that it is possible that this headstones dates to the 5th century AH/the 9th century. The characters of headstone are similar to the characters of headstone (359 AH) that was found in el-Merj (Barqa), and is currently preserved in Al Bayda Museum, particularly the shape of Haa', Ayn, Kaf, Haa, and Khaa letters, as well as in the decoration of the kashida (Arabic Tatweel or Arabic hyphen-like glyph), where the first was lobate like a tri-leaf, and the second is a simple arc form (Bubtana 2007, pp.59-60).
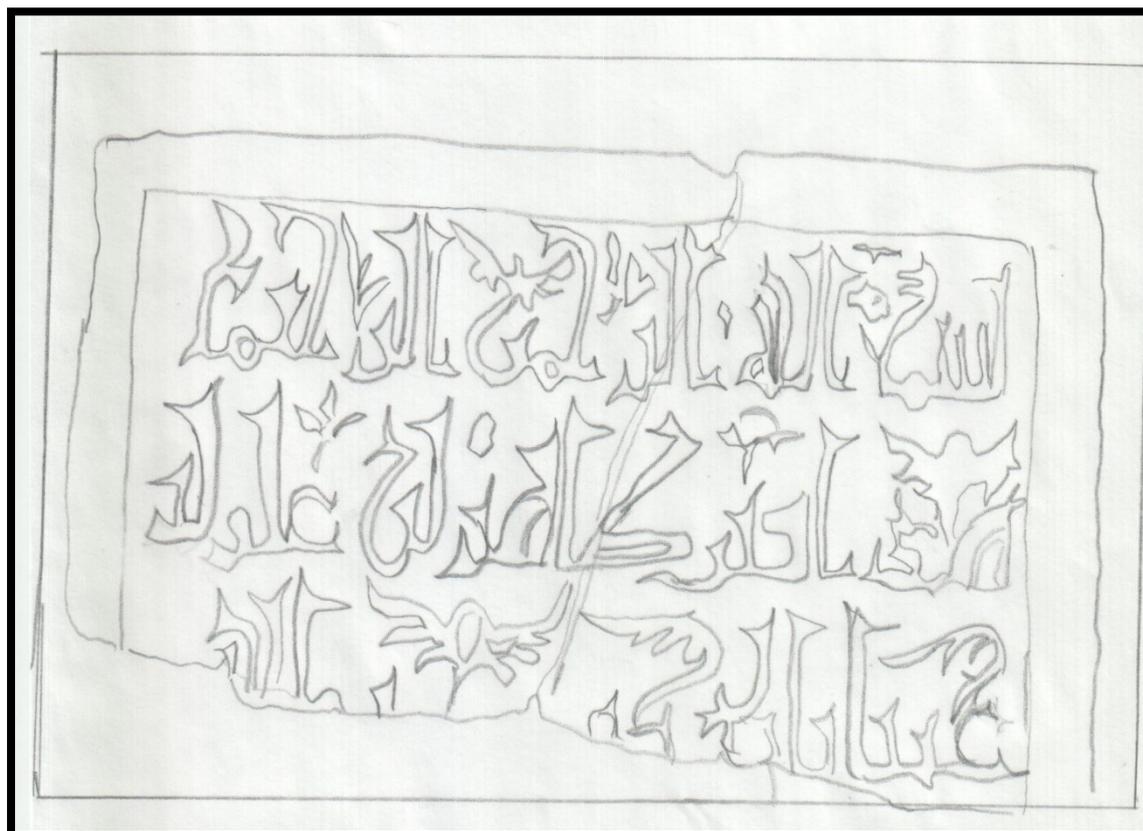
Fig. 62A&B Inscription 9 (Photo by Author)

Inscription 10

There follow now not private gravestone inscriptions but commemorative inscriptions on buildings. The kind of Kufic writing used is large, as the public commemorative purpose requires, and it is written with a raised script on a solid material such as stone, plaster and wood, with the intention of lasting as long as possible. These commemorative writings on buildings generally form inscriptional bands or zones on walls or the necks of domes and minarets. The basis of these inscriptions can be Koranic texts, propaganda expressions, the mention of the name of the person who founded the building and the date of its building.

Inscription 10 is an example of this kind of commemorative stone, and it was found in el-Merj. What was found consisted of three fragments from a frieze in stone, which would usually have surrounded the courtyard or façade of a mosque or a qasr. They were found in the city but as they were found accidentally, there is no record of the context in which they were found except a photograph taken on the site during work being done on the modern road. They are currently preserved in Tolmeitha Museum. The inscriptions are on sandstone in a relief etching style, and it was all written with a foliated Kufic style, as is clear because some letters end with bilobate leaves. Most of the text is missing, but there is clear evidence that whatever building it was attached to was official and important. The texts are missing on both sides (see Fig. 63).

Fragment 1

The Text and Translation:

1. ((Happiness Ezz....................))

)) [سعــ]ـادة لعز....................((

Fragment 2

Sandstone with inscription referring to the name of (TAMIM ELM) uiz. There is a diagonal break in the middle of the stone, but the fragments fit neatly together and there is no loss of text. The right-hand edge is cut, but the left is damaged with some loss of text (see Fig. 64 A&B and Fig. 64 C&D).

The Text and Translation:

((Ordered it Tamim.. AL [Muiz] ....))

((امر به تميم.. [المعــ]ـز........................))

Fragment 3

Sandstone with inscription, perhaps a part of the Kuranic text. Measurements missing (see Fig. 65 A&B).

The Text and Translation:

((.............Rhymes ...the...[land]............ ?))

.((.............[رض؟]............الا..[رض]؟).(

It is to be noted that the decoration here, consisting of vegetable branches, sprouts from the letters and reaches the top and we find at the end of each branch a leaf or flower bud. Inscription 10 can probably be dated to the 10th century because of the name, Tamim. The name must refer to al-Muizz Abu Tamim. It seems that he was the man who ordered the establishment of whatever building this frieze was affixed to. If we recall that the orginal name of the Fatirnid Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah (341AH/963CE-365AH/987CE) was Mu'ad Abu Tamim, then we can think it likely that the name Tamim which we see here is part of the name of that Caliph Al-Mu'izz, and that he was the one who commanded the building to be constructed.

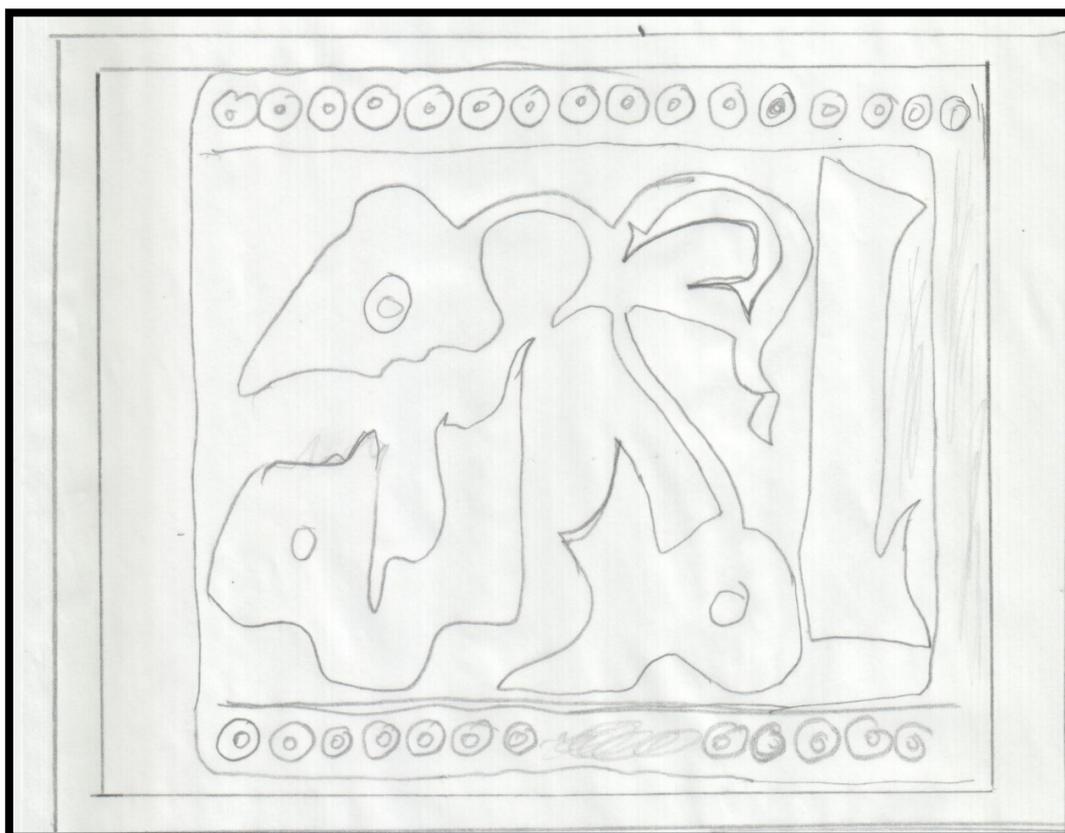*Fig. 63* Inscription 10 (Photo by Author)
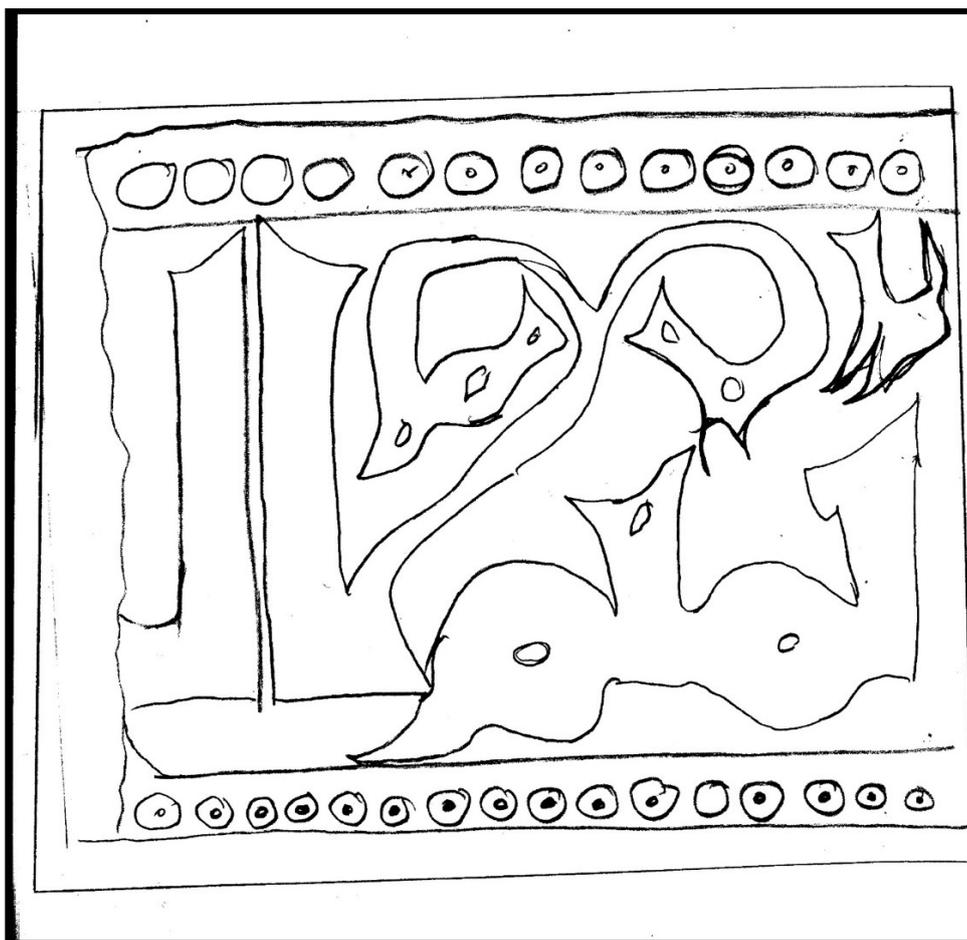
Fig. 64A&B Inscription 10 (Photo by Author)

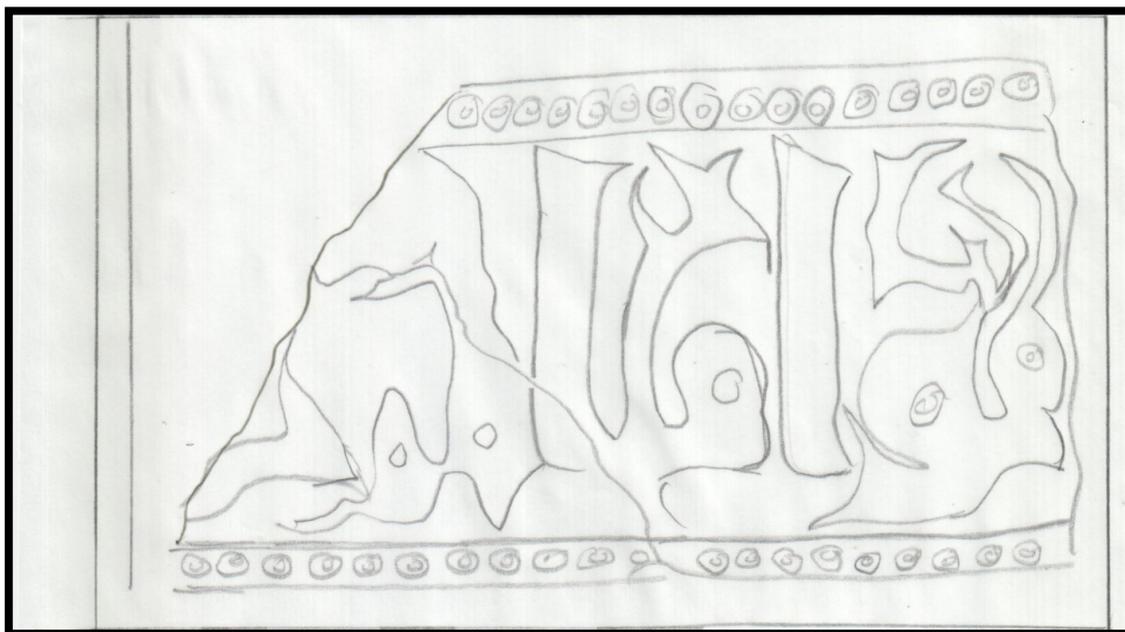*Fig. 64C&D* Inscription 10 (Photo by Author)

Fig. 65A&B Inscription 10 (Photo by Author)

Inscription 11

The most important of all the inscriptions found in the city of Barqa are, of course, the two capitals of columns in white marble already referred to in this chapter (3.1.3), inscribed in flowered Kufic. After the visit of Abdussaid and Goodchild in 1956, a few trial trenches, described by Abdussaid (Abdussaid 1971, pp.125-126), were dug on the site, near the mosque, which suggested that an important building had stood there. After the earthquake of 1963, in which the mosque was badly damaged, it became possible to remove the two columns from the mihrab, on one of which was inscribed the profession of faith which Hamilton had seen a hundred years before.

The writing on one column was the profession of the Islamic faith (the shaha-dah), on the other a reference to the name of the Fatimid Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah. These beautifully made inscriptions are considered among the most important yet found in Libya of the Fatimid period (Abdussaid 1971, p.126) (See Fig. 66 A & B). The texts read:

Column 1:

((There is no Allah but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah))

((لا اله الا الله محمداً رسول الله))

Column 2:

((Maulana Imam Al Muiz caliph Allah))

((مولانا الامام المعز خليفة الله))

The inscriptions are in bold floriate Kufic, in a low relief, bordered by guard bands. It seems that the columns had been conveyed to the Zawiyat al-Sanusiya mosque from some major building of the Fatimid period.
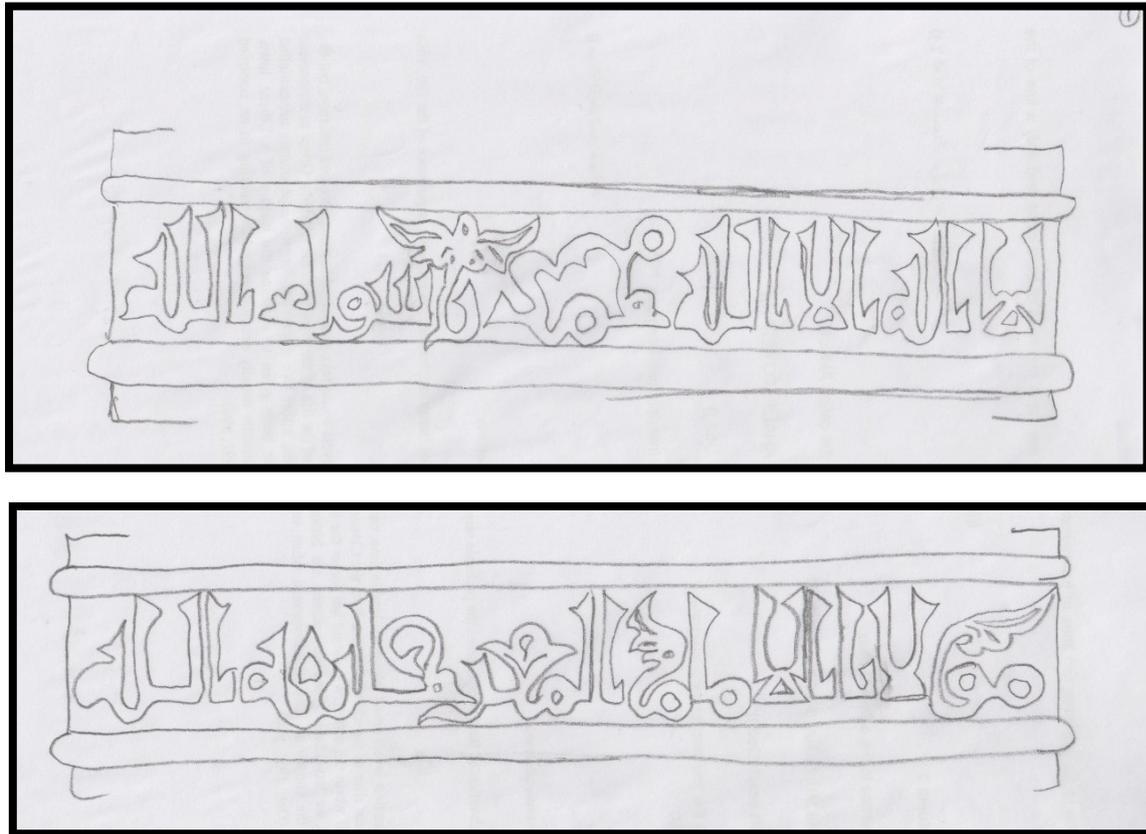

Fig. 66A&B Inscription 11 (Photo by Author).

3.3.4.3. General remarks on the Barqa inscriptions

It is very difficult to draw any kinds of well-shaped conclusions from the assortment of inscriptional remains found at Barqa, but the inscriptions presented here are evidence of the continuance over several centuries of ordinary well-ordered Islamic life in a town which was by no means inhabited only by Islamic believers. The standard of lettering and of decoration is very good.

The limestone from which the headstones are chiefly made was local to the city, but the sandstone would have had to be brought in from coastal places, and the marble must have been re-used stone from classical buildings at no great distance, because of the difficulty of transporting marble; perhaps from Cyrene or Apollonia.

Most of the headstones recorded at Barqa resemble in their overall shape the usual style of the first centuries of Islamic culture. The emphatically horizontal quality of the Kufic script engraved on the stone, together with a less emphasised verticality, translates well into a rectilinearity of shape. And that rectilinearity of the piece of stone can also itself feed back into the appearance of the script which will on occasion, in the formal contexts of these headstones, have about it the patterning of a succession of square shapes. The script and the piece of stone on which it is engraved speak to each other, so that the whole of the gravestone is a single piece of craftsmanship, even though one may suppose that, often enough, the workman who made the shape of the stone was different from the workman who made the shape of the letters.

It is possible to say that the rounded top edges of inscriptions 1 and 6 need not, however, be seen as an abandonment of the dialogue between stone and script, but rather as a sophistication of it. Although with inscription 1 the rounded top edge seems 'accidental', as though perhaps the original stone out of which the monumental piece was shaped could simply be more conveniently be made round, nevertheless even

here the verticals and horizontals of the Kufic script could be felt to be deliberately contrasted with the shape of the stone. Even more with inscription 6, it is true that the top edge and the scribal linearity are in a complex 'argument' with each other, because the rounded edge of the stone is itself 'written on' with decoration and so drifting towards the 'scribal'. It is also true that the Kufic style on this stone is itself moving towards a very relaxed linearity, the decorated ends of the letters flowering out of their straightness.

We should not suppose that the overall shape of a headstone is not of much significance by comparison with what is written on it. Rather, on occasion, it seems to contribute very significantly to the significance of the whole; as clearly it does with the very small stone of inscription 9, which must surely have been for the grave of a little child.

We know from other evidence that there lived in Barqa in these early Islamic centuries not only Muslim believers but inhabitants of a number of different races and beliefs. What has to be explained is why the inscriptional testimony set out in the preceding section consists only of Islamic material. And one has to try to arrive at an explanation of this which will, if possible, apply also in other cities of Cyrenaica where there is a similar dearth of, for instance, Christian grave inscriptions in the centuries under review. It might perhaps be suggested that what has been presented in the previous section is evidence of the ordinariness, the everyday quality of life and death among the Islamic inhabitants of the town; and that almost the *only* evidence that these ordinary residents of Barqa *also* belonged to the conquering people and the 'victorious' religion was that their ordinariness of life could *reach out* to the formal recognition of engraved stones. Perhaps for a Christian believer in this town in these centuries, although ordinary life was possible and easy, the *formal advertising of it* was not.

Much of what is written here about the inscriptions at Barqa is of necessity speculative, and little of it can contribute boldly to any well-structured archaeological picture of the town; but it should also be remembered that in archaeology the researcher *must record and present whatever is found*, no matter how little it will conveniently fit into a thesis or a presentation. It might be remembered as well that what by chance has survived in these few decorated and inscribed words from the past has a flavour of the lives lived to convey still to us, even if that is not readily to be converted into history or geography.

3.4   Conclusions and recommendations

The report on the 1990 excavation of Barqa emphasises the probable importance of the site, with its well stratified remains: "Excavating to the earliest levels could take considerable time, care and patience, but the end result, a complete slice of the life of the town from the Classical Greek to the present day, should be well worth the effort. We should not forget the absolutely unparalleled opportunity which we have been given to examine the history of a Libyan town, unencumbered by the constraints usually encountered when working in an occupied urban environment (Dore 1991, p.98)".

At present there is no evidence of a large palatial fortified structure and the construction of a large mosque constructed after the conquest. Our knowledge of the city is very limited and large constructions have been severely damaged in the earthquake. The city has been subject to limited archaeological investigations and very little is known of the ancient city of Barqa; this makes drawing conclusions a difficult exercise. There are however a few points that need to be made. It is possible that the city never had a large fort as occurred in other Cyrenaica cities, in the Fatimid period. Barqa was not conquered by force but surrendered. It gave the name to province at

the beginning, but, after that, its role remained very limited. The province of Cyrenaica was never an independent and strong region, but somehow administratively always submitted to either governors of Egypt or of Ifriqiyya (Tunisia), and in particular Qairawan. Barqa was never an important administrative centre (Bauden 2017 – See the table of governors below).

Year	Name	Notes
46 / 66 6-667- 52 / 672 or 56/ 675-676	Ruwayfi' An arT b. Ta.bit al-	Designated governor (amfr) of Barqa by Maslama b. Mab,ladal-An arT, the governor of Egypt; died in function in Barqa in 52/ 672 or 56 / 675-676; buried there
?- 76 / 695-696	Ta lTd , the client (maw- la) of 'Abd al-'AzTz b. Marwan	Ruled Barqa (kiina 'ala Barqa) until Zuhayr b. Qays al-BalawT was killed there by the Byzantines in 76/ 695-696
76/ 695-696-?	Fahd b. Ka!Tr a l-Ma 'afirT	Replaced TalTd as governor (wii fJ) .
between 105/ 724 and 125 / 743	Zahir b. Qays b. Zuhayr al-BalawT	Governor (wiifJ) of Barqa during the caliphate of Hisam; buried there.
138/ 755-756 or af- ter-?	' lya.9 b. J u ra yba b. Sa' d al-KalbT	Governor (wiili) ofBarqa
around 140/757-758	Ibn Diyas[16]	Governor (uU) of Cyrenaica (Antabulus); headed for Egypt to present the truce the inhabitants concluded with 'Amr ibn al-' As after the conquest to YazTd b. ' Abd Allah al-1: fa9ramT (deputy judge of al-Fustat in 140 / 757 until his death the same year)
148/765-766–?	ʿAbd al-Salām b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Hubayra al-Saybānī	Designated governor (amīr) of Barqa by Yazīd b. Ḥātim, the governor of Egypt.
after 171/787-788–?	Qabīṣab.Rawḥ b. Ḥātim al-Muhallabī	Designated governor (wālī) by his father once Qabīṣa joined him in Kairouan
?–227/841-842	Muḥammad b. ʿAbdawayh b. Jabala	Governor (ʿāmil) ofBarqa when a revolt ousted him in 227/841-842
?–257/870-871	Muḥammadb. Harṭama b. Ayʿan	Governor (ʿāmil) ofBarqa until 257/870-871 when the army garrisoned there expelled him

257/870-871–?	Aḥmad b. ʿĪsá al-Ṣaʿīdī	Was governor of Barqa when the province fell under the control of Ibn Ṭūlūn in 257/870-871
?–261/874-875	Muḥammad b. Farrūḫ al-Farġānī	Nominated governor (amīr) of Barqa by Ibn Ṭūlūn until the population drove him out in 261/874-875
261/874-875–?	Šuʿba b. Ḥarkām	Was appointed (istaḫlafahu ʿalá) over the city by the general who crushed the rebellion mentioned above
297/909-910–301/913-914	Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ	Designated governor of Barqa by the Abbasid governor of Egypt, Takīn[17]

Table 1 Names of the governors/administrators of Barqa identified in the sources (after Bauden 2017, pp.390-391).

It is very likely that in the Fatimid period the city had already lost importance, and more excavations should be conducted before firm conclusions can be drawn on the settlement of Barqa.

At the moment the available data suggests that it was an important centre immediately after the conquest, but never of key importance in the control of the North African territory, and this situation may have played a role in determining its limited monumental development.

Chapter 4 : Consolidation of Power: The new development of the region and the economic connections

1. The aim of this chapter

As discussed in the previous chapter Barqa (with its harbour Tolmeitha) was the first outpost set up immediately after the conquest, and gave its name to the province; however, archaeology seems to suggest that it progressively lost its central role. In the Fatimid period it is clear new urban settlements develop. The reason for this new situation is probably connected with the development of new trade routes and commercial activities. Among the settlements involved were certainly Ajdabiyah and Medina Sultan (ie Surt/Sirte). The present chapter aims to discuss the historical events which characterised the two centres and the involvement of Cyrenaica in the development of trade.

4.1. History of Ajdabiyah

There was a military garrison on the site of Ajdabiyah in the 1st century CE, probably to safeguard the caravan traffic consequent upon and facilitated by the presence of wells, as a small number of inscriptions attests (Abdussaid, 1964, p.115; Whitehouse 1971-1972, p.13; Bongianino 2015, p.183),[37] but the earlier history of the settlement is obscure. It seems probable that the presence of wells, (Blake, Hutt, Whitehouse 1970, p.106), encouraged occupation from pre-Roman times, although at present no archaeological evidence has been recorded attesting to this early period of occupation. After the fall of the Roman Empire, in the Byzantine period, the town continued to be of modest size (Blake, Hutt, Whitehouse 1970, p.107), and it was only in the Islamic period under the Fatimids, from the mid-tenth to the mid-11th century (at the very end

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[37] The earliest inscriptions found on the site, cut into the rock surface near the wells, attest to the presence of Roman soldiers of Syrian origin and date from the 1st century CE (Ferri 1925-1926, pp.362-386).

of the period under review in this thesis) that the town became a place of more considerable importance, with a thriving commercial and cultural life.

Ajdabiyah was conquered, plainly without very much difficulty, by the Arab general Amr ibn al-'As in the year 22AH/644CE.[38] He made an agreement with its inhabitants for a payment from them of a tribute of 5000 dinars and this ensured the safety of the majority of the population. Using this city as a base, the Arab armies set off in one direction under the leadership of Amr ibn al-'As to conquer Tripoli, and in another, southerly, direction under Uqba Bin Nafia[39] towards Awjila and Zuwayla (Al-Barghouthi 1971, p.217 author's translation passage 23). It has been suggested in fact that the way of the conquest followed an already existing trade route (Thiry 1995).

During the reign of the Righteous Caliphs and the Umayyad state, Ajdabiyah, like the other cities of Cyrenaica, was treated as a province of Egypt, both politics and geography persuading in this direction. It was the governor of Egypt who chose the governors of the whole Cyrenaica region up until the Abbasid era, when from 184AH/806CE to 257AH/879CE Cyrenaica came in part under the mandate of the Aghlabids. Whereas before it was ruled wholly by the then governor of Egypt, Ahmad ibn Tulun [40], now the eastern part of Cyrenaica continued under the rule of the Tulunids and the western part belonged to the Aghlabids. In the western part, the region came under the sphere of influence of Obaidullah Mahdi[41] , the first of the Fatimid Imams, who established an Aghlabid rule based on Tunis in 296AH/918CE and founded a

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[38] Amr ibn al-'As (c585CE-42AH/664CE) was most noted for being the leader of the Muslim conquest of Egypt in 640CE. He was one of the Sahaba, who rose to power quickly after his conversion in 7AH/629CE. He was the founder of the Egyptian city of Fustat and built the mosque there which is named after him.

[39] Uqba ibn Nafi (also referred to as Oqba ibn Nafi, Uqba bin Nafe, Uqba ibn al Nafia, or Akbah; 622CE–61AH/683CE) was an Arab general who was serving the Umayyad dynasty, in the Muawiyah and Yazid periods, who began the Islamic conquest of the Maghreb, including present-day Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Morocco in North Africa.

[40] Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn, (born 213AH/835CE—died 262AH/884CE) was the founder of the Ṭūlūnid dynasty that ruled Egypt and Syria between 246AH/868CE and 283AH/905CE. In Egypt. In addition, he was the first Muslim governor of Egypt sent by the Abbasid caliph.

[41] Abu Muhammad Abdallah al-Mahdi (251AH/873CE-312AH/934CE) was the founder of the Ismaili Fatimid Caliphate, the only major Shi'a caliphate in Islam, and established Fatimid rule throughout much of North Africa, the Caliph of the Fatimid Caliphate from 287AH/909CE-312AH/934CE.

Shiite Fatimid state in North Africa (Abbas 1968, p.65 author's translation passage 24). The Fatimid rule in fact developed in connection with an internal division, that set the basis for the creation of a Shiite power (for a detailed discussion, Brett 2001 and chapter 4 in Silverstein 2010).

Ajdabiyah was administratively a province of Egypt in the 8th century but by the end of the 9th century, with the founding of the Shiite Fatimid state, Fatimid control began to be directed eastwards, with the eventual aim of controlling the whole of Egypt. As this process began, control of various cities on the route towards Egypt began to pass into Fatimid hands. In the year 301AH/923CE, "Obaidullah Shiite (Obaidullah Mahdi) armies led by Hbasa Ben Youssef, moving eastwards, entered the cities of Sirte and Ajdabiyah, significantly without opposition, the soldiers of the Abbasids fleeing before them" (al-Marrakushi 1889, p.235, author's translation passage 25). And so the city of Ajdabiyah came under the control of the Fatimid state, its governor the Fatimid official, ibn kafi al-Ketama. This happened before the Fatimid advance against Egypt itself in 361AH/983CE (Ibn Abi Dinar 1967, p.63 author's translation passage 26). Ajdabiyah was the focus of Fatimid attention for several reasons. The location of the city gave it great strategic and commercial importance, as it lay directly on the route linking Africa to Egypt. It was also in an area renowned for its fertility.

The city was important to the proposed invasion of Egypt as forming a richly peopled and busy part of the supply line behind the advancing forces. The Fatimid army did not have the city as its major target, and there can also be little doubt that the passage of the army contributed to the city's trade, and would have been generally welcomed (another good reason for the rapid departure of the Abbasid garrison, who could not count on the support of the people of the city).

The target for the Fatimids (287AH/909CE-549AH/1171CE) was, then, Egypt and its enormous wealth, with its close links to the Levant and the Hijaz. There were several attempts at the invasion of Egypt which all failed, but eventually, during the reign of the Fatimid Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah,[42] another offensive was set in hand. Preparations for it begun in 355AH/977CE with the digging of wells all along the route eastwards to secure water for the army, which was to be led by Jawhar Al-Siqilli.[43] The Caliph also ordered the construction of palaces at appropriate places along the route for him to stay in as he followed the army (Al-Barghouthi 1971, p.227 author's translation passage 27).

After Jawhar Al-Siqilli had subdued and opened up Egypt in 357AH/979CE, Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah established a Fatimid administration of the territory in 361AH/983CE: "he reached Sirte on the 4th of Jumada, and he went by way of Ajdabiyah and stayed in the palace which had been built there" (Ibn Abi Dinar 1967, p.65 author's translation passage 28). During his stay, he ordered tanks to be dug to collect rainwater in the city (Al-Barghouthi 1971, p.228 author's translation passage 29). It seems probable that the actual construction of this and other formal buildings in Ajdabiyah was under the direction of Tamim Ibn Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah. There survives a stone inscription in Kufic script, at the moment preserved in the Museum at Tolmeitha (See 3.3,4.2 No 10), with simply the words 'ordered by Tamim'. Before his departure for Egypt, the Fatimid Caliph Al-Mu'izz Li-Dinillah appointed Yusuf Bulukkin Ziri ibn Manad Humairi as governor, or 'walia' of Africa but (significantly) he made no appointment of separate governors for Sicily or the cities of Tripoli, Sirte, and Ajdabiyah (Ibn al-Athir 1967, p.456

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[42] Abu Tamim Ma'ad Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah, also spelled as al-Moezz,(308AH/930CE-353AH/975CE), the most powerful of the Fāṭimid caliphs, whose armies conquered Egypt and who made the newly founded Al-Qāhirah, or Cairo, his capital in 350AH/972CE–351AH/973CE . He was the fourth Fatimid Caliph and fourteenth Ismaili imam, and reigned from 331AH/953CE-353AH/975CE.

[43] Jawhar ibn Abdallah, surnamed Ja'far al-Siqilli, al-Rumi, al-Saqlabi, al-Katib and al-Qaid, was the most important military leader in Fatimid history.

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author's translation passage 30). And so it must have been that the political and social shape of the territory he had gone through on his march towards Egypt had been fundamentally unchanged by his passing through, and needed no special governing eye kept on it. It would, as we might say, go on living just as it had before the Egyptian enterprise had begun.

After the death of Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah, the caliphate passed to his son al-Aziz (365AH/985CE-386AH/1008CE). Yusuf Bulukkin continued as governor of Ifriqiyah during this reign, and his mandate was extended to include Tripoli, Sirte, and Ajdabiyah, where he appointed conservative local officials to oversee the detail of his rule. Yusuf Bulukkin had become a figure of great importance in the Fatimid caliphate (Ibn al-Athir 1967, p.489 author's translation passage 31).

Relations became strained between Bani Ziryu and the Fatimids after Al-Mu'izz ibn Badis[44] ceased all mention of them in the Friday sermon, and instead spoke of the Abbasid caliphate, in the year 440AH/1062CE. This was the beginning of the trouble between the Fatimids and Al Sanhája, which, however, will not be discussed here in detail because it took place far from the borders of the province of Cyrenaica. In general, what happened was that the Fatimids encouraged the tribes of Banu Hilal[45] and Banu Sulaym,[46] who were settled east of the Nile, to move towards Africa in the middle of the 10th century, the Fatimid intention being the elimination of the rule of Bani Ziryu. These migrations occurred during the reign of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mustansir

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[44] Al- Muʻizz ibn Bādīs (1008 CE–1062 CE) was the fourth ruler of the Zirids in Ifriqiya, reigning from 1016 CE to 1062 CE.

[45] Banu Hilal, was a confederation of Arab tribes from the Hejaz and Najd regions of the Arabian Peninsula that emigrated to North Africa in the 11th century. Masters of the vast plateaus of Najd, they had a very bad reputation. Recent converts to Islam at the time of their migration, they were known for their depredations on the borders of Iraq and Syria. With the revolutionary movement of the Ismaili Qarmatians in Bahrain and Oman, they participated in the pillage of Mecca in 930 in their fight against the Fatimids. When the latter became masters of Egypt and the founders of Cairo in 969 CE, they hastened to confine the unruly Bedouin in the south before sending them to the Maghreb. For a detailed discussion see Brett 2001.

[46] Banu Sulaym, were an Arab tribe that had lived in Hejaz and Nejd during the rise of Islam, and settled in North Africa along with Banu Hilal in the 11th century.

bi-llah[47] (427AH/1049CE-487AH/1109CE) (Bolbyd 2009, p.53 & p.57 author's translation passage 32).

It seems that economic factors were the most important of the reasons which persuaded the Fatimids to encourage the tribes to migrate to Cyrenaica and North Africa. There was a lack of pasture east of the Nile, because of drought, and the land could no longer support massive numbers of nomads, their families and their animals. In addition to this, during the reign of Caliph al-Mustansir bi-llah, there was great political unrest and a serious spread of epidemic disease. In general, these tribes were a source of chaos and anxiety to the Fatimids in Egypt. Once the Banu Hilal and Banu Sulaym had arrived in Cyrenaica, other tribes still in Egypt were encouraged to migrate as well because of the abundance of water and pasture there. Stable settlement was achieved by 442AH/1044CE. There is no doubt that these migrations to the Maghreb would have had political, economic and social effects. Although politically Cyrenaica was affiliated to the Fatimids, and although these tribes had settled there with their blessing and encouragement, the Fatimid rule was in effect only nominal, and the presence of these migrants increased the political isolation of the region, even though the migrations had achieved stability by the middle of the 11th century (Bolbyd 2009, pp.53-54 author's translation passage 33). Cyrenaica in this period was actually under tribal rule after shaking off the distant rule of governors from outside and of Banni Qurra in the Abu Rakua revolution in 395AH/1017CE. The wave of immigration took the Banu Hilal especially onwards towards Ifriqiyah proper, modern Tunisia, leaving the Banu Sulaym in Cyrenaica and Tripoli. Banu Sulaym created no political entities in Cyrenaica because the tribe clung to its Bedouin pastoral lifestyle, simply grazing

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[47] Abū Tamīm Ma'add al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh (born 1029 CE – died 1094 CE) was the eighth caliph of the Fatimid Caliphate from (427 AH /1036 CE until 487 AD/1094 CE). He was the longest reigning Muslim ruler.

livestock and cultivating crops dependent on rainfall. However, the Banu Sulaym were able to control the Arab tribes that had arrived before them from the time of the first Muslim conquest, and also the Berbers who lived there and Jews living in such ports as Burqa, Tolmeitha and Derna (Bolbyd 2009, pp.59- 60 author's translation passage 34).

Bolbyd comments that the economic effect of these migrations cannot be doubted because of the apparent size of the movement; suggesting in addition that the Cyrenaica region was economically exhausted because of the military campaigns launched against it by the rulers of Bani Ziryu in Ifriqiyah (Tunisia). But then again he says that the migrants when they arrived encountered no resistance from the native population (Bolbyd 2009, pp.61-62 author's translation passage 35). We have been here before. It is possible to suggest that the native population, in all its commercial movement and diverse origin, had been reduced to inertia by the attacks made upon it. But it could also be that at this point we are a little at the mercy of the vivid imagining of mediaeval historians, with, as Bolbyd puts it, devastation in the region, with burning of cities and cutting down of trees and forests, if we are to trust ancient historians like Ibn Al-Athir, Ibn Idhari al-Marrakushi and Ibn Khaldun who describe it. One might suggest, on the other hand, that if a city were to be burnt in the way suggested, it might well have been Ajdabiyah; and one might look carefully for evidence of destruction by fire in excavating in the city

Ibn Khaldun[48] focuses on the migrations of the Banu Sulaym, Banu Hilal, and other tribes, and on the consequent economic and political deterioration in Ifriqiyah. He

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[48] Ibn Khaldūn, in full Walī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Khaldūn (born732AH/1354CE, Tunis [Tunisia] died 808AH/1430, Cairo, Egypt), the greatest Arab historian, who developed one of the earliest nonreligious philosophies of history, contained in his masterpiece, the Muqaddimah ("Introduction"). He also wrote a definitive history of Muslim North Africa.

writes: "of Burqa landmarks and cities destroyed; of areas returned to the nomadic Arabs after they had been occupied by the Lawata and Hawwara. and other barbarians" (Ibn-Khaldun 1968, vol 6, p.204 author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 36). He writes, of Lepcis Magna and Zuwayla and Cyrenaica and the Palace of Hassan that they were returned to "desolate wasteland, and as if they were not" (Ibn-Khaldun1968, vol 4, p.204 author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 37). He describes the migrants as "like locusts, passing over no place without destroying it, until they came to Ifriqiyah" (Ibn-Khaldun 1968, vol 6, p.31 author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 38).

Many historians, both present and past, have accepted these accounts without scrutiny, and have presented the state of affairs there evoked as the beginning of an economic and political crisis prevailing in Ifriqiyah (Tunisia) in the 10th century. However, if we scrutinise ibn Khaldun's narrative, we find in it a lot of seeming exaggeration, and little objectivity. Perhaps his own aristocratic origins influenced his writing about the Bedouin; and we must remember that he was writing already three centuries after the events described.

Historians and travellers who actually lived through the period of these migrations say nothing of the kind we find in Ibn Khaldun, about cities burnt and trees and forests cut down; and there is no evidence of it in the archaeological record. Al-Bakri, who visited Cyrenaica in 487AH/1109CE describes the continuance of good life, wealth, and abundant pasture in the city of Ajdabiyah: a great city situated in a desert of hard stone and possessing several rock-cut wells yielding good water. There is also a sweet water spring...This city contains a mosque of beautiful architecture founded by Abu al-Qasim, son of 'Ubaid Allah, the octagonal minaret of which is an admirable construction. "It also contains baths, caravanserais and much-frequented

bazaars...The town has a seaport named al-Mahour, which is 18 miles distant; and it also contains three qasrs " (Al-Bakri 1857, pp.5-6; author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 39).

Many Orientalists, like Gaultier and Julien have based their views of the Bedouin on the report of ibn Khaldun, and have asserted that the economic crisis of the 11th century was caused by the Bedouin migration from Egypt to Africa. On the other hand, other modern historians and Orientalists have objected to this pointing at the migrations of Banu Sulaym, Banu Hilal, as the cause of instability and the deterioration of the political and economic situation in Ifriqiyah in general (Bolbyd 2009, pp.113-114; author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 40). Among these, Goodchild has pointed out that the decline of settled agriculture and the decay of wealth in Cyrenaica seems to go back to the 3rd century, and to be the consequence of the arbitrariness of the Romans in collecting taxes, and of the Vandal invasion (Goodchild 1970, p.38). John Ponce, too, has warned against trusting too much the account of Ibn Khaldun because it dates from so long after the events described, and is plainly subjective.

Many changes must have occurred that could not possibly have been directly caused by the migrations (Bolbyd 2009, pp.113-114). There must certainly have been some disturbance as the result of the arrival of nomads in large numbers with their families and animals, especially perhaps their camels, and some damage to the land must have ensued. However, the picture given of Cyrenaica by its archaeology in the period under review in this thesis seems to suggest rather that it was precisely in a state where it might have been able to absorb a large number of immigrants, to make use of their presence, and to come rapidly to terms with their strangeness; that the migrations were not the fundamental cause of the eventual economic crisis, for which

the Vandal attack and the change of climate over a period of time are probably responsible.

4.2 History of Medina Sultan (ie Surt/ Sirte)

The mediaeval settlement at Medina Sultan has been thought to date from the Islamic conquest of Libya in 34AH/656CE by 'Amr ibn al-'As (who would have passed by Iscina on his march to Tripoli between 32AH/654CE and 33AH/655CE), and *perhaps,* as has been suggested, it was at first a garrison town or *misr* controlling the region (Mouton et Racinet 2011, p.34). There was however already a Roman settlement, but it was located to the west of the Islamic city. Both Medina Sultan (ie Surt/ Sirte) and Ajbadiyah were also of great importance to the much later attempts of the Fatimid Caliphs to conquer Egypt (347AH/969CE), because they strengthened and assured long and vulnerable lines of communication (see above 4.1). The armies required food, water and strong fortifications along the road. The Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah Fatimid on his accession to the Caliphate (341AH/963CE) began responding to these needs. He ordered a fortress to be built every 30 miles along the road extending between Mahdiyya and Egypt to overcome the difficulties, as al-Khatb says: "al-Muizz built a fortress at every thirty miles between Mahdiyya and Egypt" (al-Khatb1964, p.59 author's translation passage 41). Almaghribi notes that the route between Medina Sultan and Fayyum in Egypt was the shortest way to Egypt and that Caliph Muizz ordered a number of cisterns to be constructed along the way to store rain water for the soldiers to use and to facilitate their access to Egypt (Al-maghribi, p.149 author's translation passage 42) (see Fig. 67).

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Fig. 67 A map showing the route of Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah Fatimid (compiled from the written account of Al-maghribi).

Al-Maqrizii[49] confirms this. He gives the date of the drilling of these wells and the building of the fortresses. He says "at age fifty-five and in the year three hundred (355AH/977AD), Muizz ordered the drilling of wells on the way to Egypt and built his palaces everywhere" (Maqrizii 1967, p.96; author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 30).

The presence of forts, as recorded everywhere in North Africa, also in time facilitated the development of associated urban settlements, which were to be protected by the fort.

Since the route of the conquest probably followed the commercial routes, forts were mostly located in areas where cities already existed. This is proved also by the fact that the Fatimids were not multiple founders of cities on the route to Egypt, and that

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[49] Al-MaqriziiTaqi al-Din Abu al-Abbas Ahmad ibn 'Ali ibn 'Abd al-Qadir ibn Muhammad al-Maqrizi (1364–1442) was an Egyptian Arab historian more commonly known as al-Maqrizi or Makrizi. Although he was a Mamluk-era historian. he was interest in the Isma'ili Fatimid dynasty and its role in Egyptian history.

they made already existing Sirte (Medina Sultan) and Ajdabiyah their military fulcrum in the assault on Egypt, the places from which to organise the provision of the army with food and water for this part of the route. Medina Sultan was a base station in the conquest of Egypt in 358AH/980CE (See 4.1). As we mentioned when discussing the Islamic conquest of Ajdabiyah, Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah Fatimid when he left Ifriqiya for Egypt, made Belkin bin Ziri ibn Manad the governor (Wālī) of Ifriqiya, but excluded Libya from the latter's direct control; and Tripoli, Sirte and Ajdabiyah were assigned to the Fatimid Governor, Abd Allah bin YaKhlaf Al-Kutami. After the death of Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah, the caliphate passed to his son al-Aziz (365AH/987CE-386AH/1008CE). Yusuf Bulukkin, the governor (Wālī) of Ifriqiyah during this reign, continued throughout it, and his mandate was extended to include Tripoli, Medina Sultan, and Ajdabiyah, where he appointed conservative local officials to oversee the detail of his rule. Yusuf Bulukkin was allowed to designate his own governor, whose name was Abu l-Futuh Yahya al Milyani, in 367HA/977AD (Ibn al-Athir 1967, vol 8, p.489; author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 44 and 4.1). Thus Medina Sultan and Ajdabiyah came under the control of Qairawan, not Cairo, and this was an important step in the piecemeal process of Belkin bin Ziri independence from the Fatimids.

After Belkin bin Ziri died his son Al-Mansur succeeded to the Zirid rule in Qairawan; and when al-Mansur died his son in turn, Badis Ibn Al-Mansur, succeeded also to the Zirid rule in Qairawan, Badis leaving Tripoli to Banu Khazrun al-Zanati in 391AH/1013CE, and the region of Barqa to the Fatimids (Ibn Idhari 1951, vol. 1, pp.251-52; author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 45). Throughout the period, from 391AH/1013CE-429AH/1051CE, we find the Fatimids supporting Banu Khazraj

against the Zirids, thus bringing Medina Sultan (ie Surt/ Sirte) into alliance with the Fatimids in Egypt (Hamdani 1970, pp.336-339).

Abbas Hamdani suggests the mid-8th century for the founding of Islamic cities proper at Ajdabiyah and Medina Sultan (ie Surt/ Sirte), with Ajdabiyah founded first. This might also provide a date for the building of the earliest stage of the mosque at Medina Sultan (Fehérvári 2002, pp.15,19). Fehérvári, however, believes that the first mosque site at Medina Sultan would have been in the mid-7th century CE, and that this could explain the subsequently uncorrected orientation of the mihrab (Fehérvári 2002, pp.19, 34; see below chapter 5). Supposed traces of a more ancient town a little to the west and close to the sea were identified with Charax and Iscina by Goodchild (Goodchild 1964, pp.99-106) in the 1950s. More modern investigation has revealed no definite suggestion of the remains of structures, however, although (importantly) the use in the mediaeval town of Byzantine and earlier worked stone does support the suggestion that nearby there were the remains of older occupation when this Islamic town began to be built (Mouton et Racinet 2011, p.34).

We should be cautious, of course, about supposing that words like 'when this Islamic town began to be built' can be taken as the 'founding' of a city in the way, for instance, that Alexander the Great founded Greek cities in the wake of his conquests, or in the way that the Greek cities of Cyrenaica were a presence very sudden, very marked in place and time in the region. The archaeological remains of the Greek cities suggest extensively planned urban environments placed on a site. The Islamic archaeological evidence is less decisive and obtrusive than this. With the Islamic evidence, we are in the presence rather of a gradual growth into an Islamic character. The Greek colonies came to Cyrenaica meaning to stay, and meaning to remain Greek, and they built accordingly. Perhaps we should better say of the Islamic conquerors that they passed

through and some of them stayed and found ways of accommodating their own styles of life to the styles of life already lived there. Thus the traces they have left for the archaeologist are less defined, more subtle, more enmeshed with the usual customs and habits of the region. As I have said before, it probably took the passage through a city of a great Caliph on his way to somewhere else, long after the first Islamic occupants had begun to live a shared life with Berbers, Copts, and Jews, to make some distinctive Islamic impress on a place hitherto much more of a community with an ethnic and religious *mixture*. We shall perhaps see when we come to discuss in detail the mosque at Medina Sultan that it can be understood as beginning (a long beginning) as a convenience for the Muslim faithful and only later became an advertising of the Muslim faith, and perhaps never, or very late, an insistence upon it. Perhaps even the splendid late mosque in Medina Sultan did not quite mean what a temple to Athene might have meant immediately to the community of inhabitants of a Greek town in Cyrenaica.

Hugh Kennedy has suggested that we should think carefully about the 'supposed dichotomy' between, in the earlier Arabic world: 'organic' or naturally growing cities, which are assumed to have irregular and haphazard street layouts, and planned cities in which the streets ,squares and public buildings were laid out with clear deliberation. From the 1930s a succession of French scholars set up a paradigm of the 'oriental city' which was essentially a negative one. It concentrated on the decline from an imagined classical ideal and the decay of institutions of self-government which in turn led to a collapse of town planning and a chaos of narrow streets, dead-ends and the absence of significant public buildings and spaces. In this argument it was not just that ancient cities decayed but also that new cities were not 'founded' in the way in which

classical ones had been but were rather unplanned 'organic' growths which hardly deserved the name of cities (Kennedy 2010, pp.45-46).

Medina Sultan reached a period of great urban prosperity during the 9th and 10th centuries, under the Fatimids, which, to be sure, gradually led to a struggle for the independence of the whole Syrtic region by the beginning of the 11th century (Fehérvári 2002, p.17). Indeed, the 'Medina' element in the name indicates that at some point the city was regarded as belonging to the most significant category of urban settlement: "Arabic has a fairly clearly defined vocabulary for units of settlement. The largest and most important of these was the *madina* or city. Smaller places are sometimes called *balad*, which implies an urban entity of some sort. The distinction between a *madina* and a *balad* is not always clear but it seems as if a *madina* would have to be provided with a mosque with a *minbar* (pulpit: implying a resident imam to lead prayers) to deserve the title. This is stated explicitly by the great tenth-century geographer al-Muqaddasi who notes that 'no place can be called a *madina* in this science (*'ilm*) of ours unless it has a *minbar*' [Muqaddasi 1906]. In the first centuries of Islam we also find towns referred to as *amsar* (*misr* sing.). A *misr* was an urban centre where there was a *diwan* containing the names of those entitled to payments by the government ('*ata*) and where the salaries and pensions were disbursed. *Amsar* were a subset of *mada'in* (cities), all *amsar* were cities but not all cities were *amsar*, distinguished, not by size or antiquity but by their roles in the fiscal administration of the state" (Kennedy 2010, p.45).

Kennedy, in trying to answer the question 'how to found an Islamic city', concentrates on newly founded cities in the 'early Muslim world' (Kennedy 2010, p.45), and he suggests that the simple distinction between 'planned and classical' and 'organic and chaotic', as a way for instance of distinguishing the Greek urban enterprise from the

Islamic is too simple; and that there is considerable evidence that new Islamic cities were to be found at every point on the continuum between 'planned' and 'chaotic'. He suggests that most new Islamic cities were a hybrid mixture of both, where a clear basic plan left also ample room for individual 'unplanned' growth. If we contemplate Kennedy's distinctions for the purposes of this chapter on Medina Sultan, then this city would fall into a different kind of hybrid category from any that he considers, as being not quite, not altogether, newly founded, as being the result of living in a city where the classical presence was still to be felt but where the classical urban *impulse* had been replaced, had been set at a distance.

Perhaps in the period of its prosperity during the 9th and 10th centuries, Medina Sultan, then, was a *madina* of some sort of hybrid variety. However, during the 11th century, alliance with Fatimid Egypt shaded into dependence, and then neglect of the whole region by the beginning of the 12th century. At this point there seems to have been, not as sometimes suggested in the past a dramatic and decisive destruction of the town in the middle of the 11th century by the nomadic Bedouin tribes of Bani Hilal and Bani Sulaym but rather a gradual shift from settled to nomadic or semi-nomadic occupation, this leading eventually to a more limited and specialised importance for the town as a military stronghold and a political centre of this by now turbulent region, a battleground between the Fatimids and Zirid, stranded between the settled regions to the east and the west. It may be, too, as Hamdani suggests (Hamdani 1970, pp.336-339), that there was a change in the Fatimid trade routes in the 11th century, reflecting the fact that, once established in Egypt, they no longer thought much of the regions to the west. This may be true, but it is also my argument that, for instance, the military importance of Medina Sultan (ie Surt/ Sirte) during perhaps the whole of the 13th century is not easily and simply to be translated into prosperity, for those who lived

there, nor the disappearance of military importance easily to be translated into decline. There is no doubt that between about the 13th century and the modern period, the population of Medina Sultan gradually left it and that so began indeed a decline which led to its final abandonment and disappearance by the beginning of the modern period (King 1989, p.202; Mouton et Racinet 2011, p.35). We do not know what the reasons for the gradual abandonment of the site were.

4.3 Cities and trade in the Islamic period.

The initial settling of the Arabs in the region, is interconnected probably also to trade activities and their re-organisation. It has been argued on many occasions that the Arab conquest followed the trade routes (Mattingly et al. 2015). It is in fact very likely that a strict economic connection between the Pentapolis in Cyrenaica and Fazzan existed (Thiry 1995, p.55), even before and continued also after the Arab conquest, but is developed through time, from the initial conquest to a more substantially organised system from the Fatimid period. Yet reconstructing ways and systems of interconnectivity is always extremely complicated, due to our limited understanding of the materials travelling after the Roman and Byzantine period. Pottery, which was our major element for investigation for these periods to provide dating and to identify commercial exchanges after the Arab conquest (Bonifay 2019), ceased to be identifiable and sources at least until the 10th century are substantially silent on the trade systems. In this panorama discussing whether trade continued after the Arab conquest and in what form, has always been a difficult exercise and only in recent times have scholars started to address the evidence more critically. Another difficult aspect of this analysis is the way in which especially North Africa has always been in scholarly terms approached, having on one side scholars working on North Africa and on the other side scholars working on Trans-Saharan trade. Recently this approach

has been side-stepped and some new trends have been identified. In an inside-out perspective and looking at the Mediterranean and North Africa, the situation is even more complicated. The limited sources make it difficult to fully reconstruct contacts, although a few points on what materials were traded can provide some information (see Fig 68 A&B).
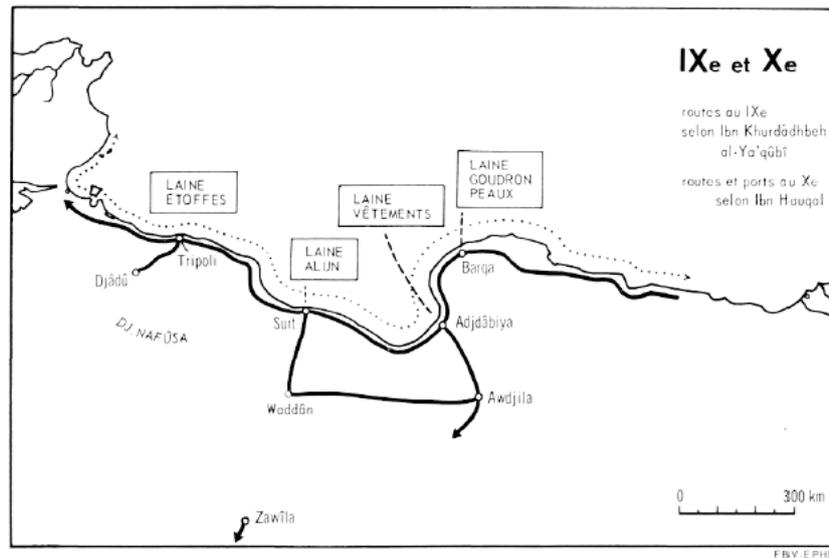
Fig. 68A A map showing trading routes based on 9th and 10th century (key: laine = wool; miel = honey; goudron = tar; étoffes = cloth; alun = alum; vêtements = clothing; peaux = skins) (after Vanacker 1973).
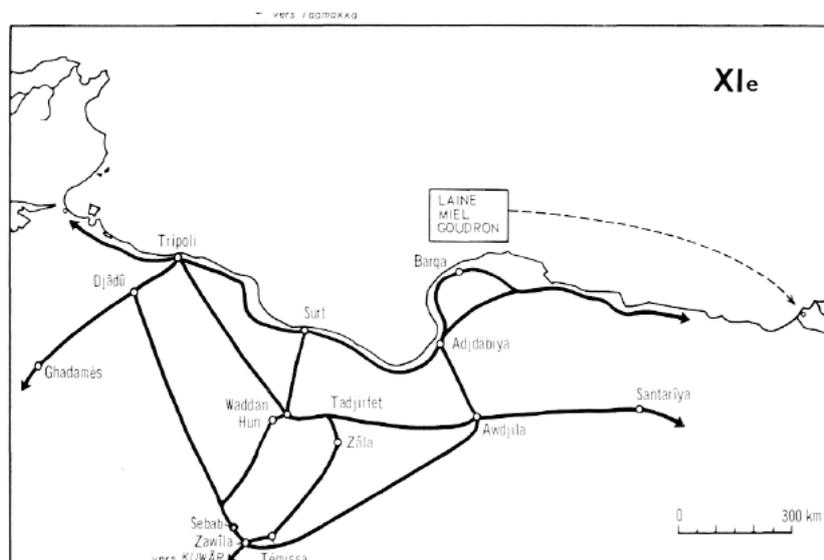
Fig. 68B a map showing trading routes based on 11th century (key: laine = wool; miel = honey; goudron = tar) (After Vanacker 1973).

It is significant to note that in the 9th and 10th centuries the majority of the goods exported were textiles, alum and tar. These materials are all impossible to trace

archaeologically and here is where one of the major problems occurs for our understanding of the trade from north Africa into the Mediterranean. The evidence from coinage with a presence of one coin minted in Barqa recorded in southern Spain (See 3.3.4.1) seems to suggest that connectivity operated on a larger scale than on a regional or intra-regional basis. Arab sources also allow us to identify that the trade in this phase was still very expansive, moving towards the west and the east of the Mediterranean, and following the scheme of exchange and connectivity which had characterised the Mediterranean for the whole of the Roman and Byzantine periods. In the 11th century clearly the centre of the trade shifted towards the east and new balances and organisation developed. This change had certainly an impact on the settlements of Cyrenaica considered in this thesis. In this reorganisation of the trade, the harbour of Tolmeitha continued to play a significant role, but progressively all the other centres lost their importance (Vanacker 1973). Ajdabyiah, Medina Sultan (ie Surt/ Sirte) and Tolmeitha (as the port of Barqa) also had an important role in this period in opening up economic activities to the Mediterranean.

The trade in the Mediterranean was effectively developing as result of an intensive activity which had developed on a trans-regional basis and had existed for a very long time.

To the South, looking to inland trade, the connection between Cyrenaica and the Fezzan outposts to the trans-Sahara is well attested by the fact that immediately after the Arab conquest the governor 'Uqba was residing in Barqa and Zuwīla in the Fezzan region (Thiry 1995, p.57). The conquest of Zuwīla refers to raids from Barqa by 'Uqba in 642 CE (Monès 1988, p.231). It is not however clear if at this stage Zuwīla is already an urban settlement or if it was to develop at a later stage, due to the increasing trade (Mattingly at al 2015). It is however important to highlight here that the conquest of

Zuwīla was seen to be essential, clearly for its economic implication of control and maintenance of the long distant land trade (see Fig. 69). The fact that both Barqa and Zuwīla were both the residence of the governor indicates their strict connection. It clearly suggests the presence of a well-established existing routes, which were probably developing from the trade.
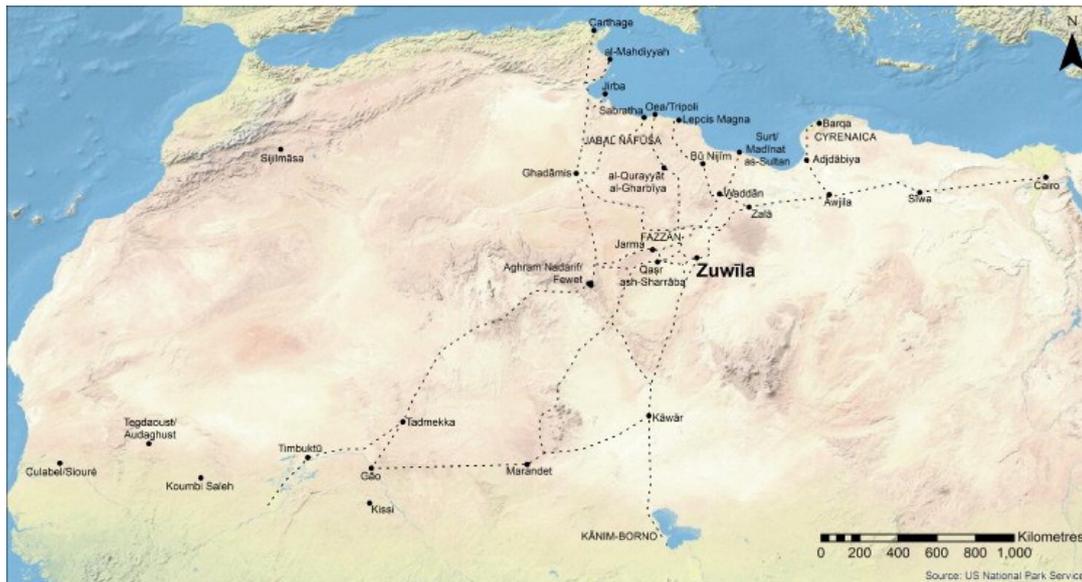
Fig. 69 A map showing trading routes (after Mattingly at al 2015).

It is, therefore, probably not the case that Barqa and Zuwīla were conquered at the same time, after 642. The conquest of Barqa, as discussed above, was peaceful and encompassed the agreement with the Berber Lawata which were occupying the city (Thiry 1995, p.55). Because of this it probably did not cause a substantial change in the life of the city, the inhabitants continued to be mostly the same, hence the limited construction activities recorded at Barqa. The role that Barqa had played for a long time in the trans-Saharan trade was probably one of the driving factors of its acquired new importance immediately after the conquest. The trade to the south followed mainly two different directions, Tripolitania was strictly connected with the west Fezzan and Cyrenaica with east Fezzan (Thiry 1995, p.55), although the two different routes were probably interconnected. The distance between Barqa and Zuwīla, was considerably

shorter than others, they could be reached in 20 – 23 days of travel, therefore was the most convenient to be carried out.

What was traded along these routes? Looking at the trans-Saharan market two distinctive phases can be identified. The first one that develops immediately after the conquest and sees Barqa as central, from the beginning of the 8th century to the 9th century. In this period the trade is controlled primarily by the Berbers, who have converted to Islam (Botte 2011, p.27). One of the driving reasons to the development of the trade is the need of slaves. Zaydan, a 9th century author, refers to North Africa being conquered by the Arabs specifically as a land for slaves (Pipes 1985, p.168). Effectively this specific aim has to be seen in the Arab-Berber agreement made immediately after the Arab conquest with Barqa and its Berber inhabitants. The agreement in fact encompassed the payment of thirteen thousand dracmas, that could be paid in slaves, if they could not find the money (Thiry 1995, p.30-51). During the 8th and 9th centuries. the slave trade becomes almost a monopoly for the Berbers (Savage 1992, p.351). The ancient sources in fact seem to show that between the 8th and the 9th centuries the Ibadis Berbers have the control over the three major trans Saharan routes connecting the Maghreb to Africa; in this respect also Zuwīla was not an exception, and it was occupied by Berber Ibadis (Mattingly et al. 2015). The connection with Sudan goes through Zuwīla, and therefore Barqa and Cyrenaica. Medina Sultan (ie Surt/ Sirte) was a second essential centre especially in connection with Tripolitania. There were 2100 km between Medina Sultan (ie Surt/ Sirte) and the Lake Tchad, 1000 km less than along the route Tâhert-Gao and Fès-Ghâna (Thiry 1995, p.447). The slave trade also developed in strict connection with the gold trade. It continued with no doubt into the Fatimid period, when there is evidence of recruitment of slave soldiers.

This practice was certainly carried forward until the beginning of the 11th century, with the evidence of Sudanese slave soldiers serving the Zirids (Botte 2011, p.63).

The Fatimid period sees further development of the southern trade, widening the connections to include cities like Ajdabiyah and Medina Sultan. Al-Bakri in 1068 in fact refers to the fact that the rulers of Zuwīla were careful in negotiating with the Fatimids. The trade towards the trans Saharan region played a significant role in the economy of North Africa, but also in the development of these cities and as said above, this was not only focussing on slaves but also including gold and ivory.

Connectivity and economic organisation directed and impacted on the development of the three centres of Ajdabiyah, Medina Sultan and Barqa. The intensification of the internal trade between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania and with the Tran-Saharan regions probably favoured the development in particular of Ajdabiyah and Medina Sultan starting from the 9th century onwards, while Barqa, despite having given the name to the province after the conquest, never became a central economic hub, but a place of transition to reach the harbour site of Tolmeitha.

4.4 Conclusions

This chapter has reconsidered critically the Arab sources referring to the site of Ajdabiyah and Medina Sultan (ie Surt/ Sirte), which saw a substantial urban development in the Fatimid period. These are the 'new Islamic cities', whose form and the scholarly debates about it are here discussed. The essential and key point to take into consideration in this analysis is the economic role of these centres and their evolution. The aim of this chapter is to provide the historical and economic as well as theoretical background for the next chapters which are reconsidering archaeologically the new urban centres of Ajdabiyah and Medina Sultan.

Chapter 5 : Ajdabiyah

5. The aim of this chapter

After the historical and economic introduction in Chapter 4, this chapter is aiming to reconsider critically the archaeological evidence from the site of Ajdabiyah. The focus will be on the new set of monuments characterising this early Islamic city and the documentary evidence, with a special attention to the inscriptions.

5.1 Geography

The ancient site of Ajdabiyah lies 150km to the south of Benghazi and 18km inland from the coast, near the east end of the Gulf of Sirte (see Fig. 67). As discussed at length in the previous chapter, in Roman times, it was known as Corniclanum, and it was a significant station, for reasons to do with its geographical position, on the coastal route between Barqa and Oea (Tripolitania) from then until the Fatimid period in the 10th century, being sufficiently supplied with wells; it was linked also to the south by a route right into the interior, running down towards Chad and the Sudan (Hardy-Guilbert 2010, p.79; Bongianino 2015, p.183). The site is only about 10-20m above sea level, even though relatively far from the coast, and it is not a naturally defensible position. Its significance was to do with the presence of water and the consequent meeting of major routes between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, and from the south to the interior of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania (see Fig. 70) (King 1989, p.196; Blake, Hutt, Whitehouse 1970, p.106-107).
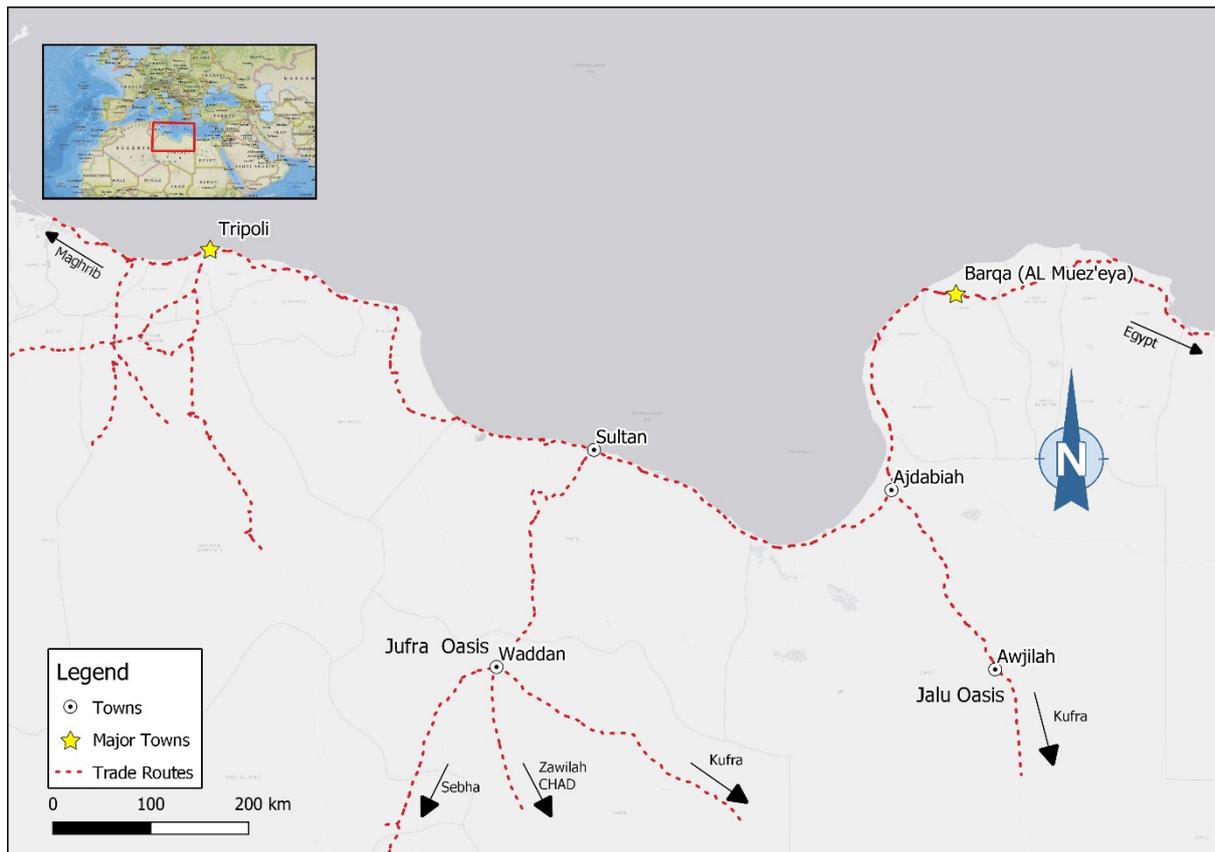
Fig. 70 A map showing Ajdabiyah and the Routes of Trade of the 4th century AH/10th century CE (after Whitehouse 1972)

It is perhaps not too much to say that the fact that Ajdabiyah is not in a naturally defensible position and yet remained important, as discussed in chapter 4, at least from Roman times onwards until the end of the period covered by this thesis, the 10th century itself suggests the kind of archaeology one might expect to find there.

5.2 Ajdabiyah in the books of travellers and geographers

Probably the oldest mention of the city was by Ibn Khordadbeh[50] in his *Kitab al Masalik w'al Mamalik* (The book of roads and kingdoms), written in 232AH/858CE, in which he computed the distance from Cyrenaica [i.e. Barka] to Ajdabiyah as 154 miles (Khordadbeh 1889, pp.85-86, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 46).

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[50] Ibn Ḵordadbeh, Abu'l-Qasem ʿObayd-Allah b. ʿAbd-Allāh (300AH/922CE), author of the earliest surviving Arabic book of administrative geography.

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Al-Yaqoubi [51] described the city at the end of the ninth century (278AH/900CE) in his book *Kitab al-Buldan* (The book of countries): "the city of Ajdabiyah, a walled city with a mosque and market places, from Berenice to it two stages, and from it to Barqa [i.e. Cyrenaica] four stages" (Al-Yaqoubi 1892, p.344, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 47). Al-Yaqoubi was probably the first to mention the mosque at Ajdabiyah, and to say the city was surrounded by a wall. Here is clear evidence that the mosque is not to be dated to the 10th century, but that there was evidence of the earlier building.

In 367AH/989CE, Ibn Hawqal[52] described the city in his *Surat al-'Ard* (The image of the earth): a city [Ajdabiyah] on a flat ground of stone, built of mud and bricks, some with stones. It has a clean mosque. Many Berbers pass by the city...and it has palm trees adequate to their needs. There is a resident governor [Wali] because of the importance of taxes paid by the Berbers, raised on their crops, their vegetables and orchards. He [Wali] is the prince of the city and the master of its roads. He [Wali] levies taxes, in addition to what he takes from the Sultan, on passing convoys of travellers from the countries of Sudan. The city is also close to the Moroccan sea where boats come with goods and sail back with different kinds of merchandise" (Ibn Hawqal 1892, pp.70-71, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 48).

Ibn Hawqal's description of the city aims for completeness: starting with its topography, going on to its buildings and the materials used in their construction, describing its population and what facilities it offers those who live there; it ends with trade relations and a description of exports and imports. Ibn Hawqal illustrates its commercial

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[51] Al-Yaqoubi, Aḥmad Ibn Abū Yaʿqūb Ibn Jaʿfar Ibn Wahb Ibn Wāḍiḥ Al-yaʿqūbī (died 283AH/905CE), Arab historian and geographer.
[52] Ibn Hawqal, Muḥammad Abū'l-Qāsim was a 10th-century muslim Arab writer, geographer, and chronicler. His famous work, written in 355AH/977CE, is called Ṣūrat al-'Arḍ. The date of his death is not precisely known. Jonathan Bloom notes that ibn Hawqal thought the mosque 'elegant' and that al-Bakri commented on the 'admirable workmanship' of the octagonal minaret; he observes that "the excavated remains hardly justify either remark" (Bloom 1985, p.25).

importance, especially in the control of trade by the land routes towards the Sudan; and emphasises too the importance of its maritime trade, even though the sea is far from the city.

A century later, the city was still thriving when Al-Bakri[53] visited it: still an important commercial centre, with its hotels, bathhouses and markets, and its wealthy population. Al-Bakri shared ibn Hawqal's emphasis on the importance of its maritime trade, noting that the city had a marina some miles away on the sea front known as al-Mahor. As did other travellers (ibn Hawqal and Al-Yaqoubi), he mentioned the mosque, adding that it was built by Abu al-Qasim bin Obeid-Allah. As a sign of the city's prosperity, he mentions that it had three palaces 18 miles from the sea. This is perhaps the first mention of palaces in Ajdabiyah. Al-Bakri's description of the city makes clear that from the 9th until the 11th century its prosperity was firmly grounded, a prosperity reflected in buildings both of stone and mud brick, in palaces and bathhouses, in trade relations by land and sea, and in a wealthy population (Al-Bakri 1857, pp.5-6, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 49).

In the 12th century, Al-Idrisi [54] mentions Ajdabiyah in *Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi'khtiraq al-afaq* (The book of Pleasant Journeys into Faraway Lands), most often known as the Tabula Rogeriana: "the city of Ajdabiyah is located on flat stony land, and used to have a wall. Now only two palaces remain in the desert. The sea is four miles away. There is no vegetation around it, and its people are mostly Jewish and Muslim traders. Neither Ajdabiyah nor Barka has running water. The water is mostly from fountains.

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[53] Al-Bakri, Abū ʿUbayd ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Muḥammad ibn Ayyūb ibn ʿAmr al-Bakrī, or simply Al-Bakri (405AH/1027CE-487AH/1109CE) was an Andalusian Muslim geographer and historian.

[54] Al-Idrisi, Abu Abd Allah Muhammad al-Idrisi al-Qurtubi al-Hasani al-Sabti, or simply Aldrissi, was a Muslim geographer cartographer and Egyptologist who lived in Palermo, Sicily at the court of King Roger II, Muhammed al-Idrisi was born in Ceuta (493AH/1115CE-559AH/1181CE).

There are small farms on which are grown a little wheat, but mostly barley and different kinds of pulses and grains" (Al-Idrisi 1957, pp.99-100, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 50)

A comparison between the description of Al-Idrisi and that of ibn Hawqal makes clear that Al-Idrisi quotes from ibn Hawqal some passages, such as "Ajdabiyah city of open land of flat stone... neither Ajdabiyah nor Barqa had running water" and he tells us that it had two palaces in the desert. Perhaps the palaces referred to are those mentioned by Al-Bakri in his book. It is interesting that such a geographer as Al-Idrisi seems to rely at least in part on other written accounts of the city for Ajdabiyah, whereas in his description and account of Cordova, a much more important place, he is a particularly reliable, detailed, first-hand witness. Tamari speaks of his merits in Cordova: "in absolute contradiction to this original, meticulous, and innovative observation...are found the stereotypes of all the geographers before and after al-Idrisi" (Tamari 1996, p.28).

After Al-Idrisi, there was no mention of Ajdabiyah in the books of travellers and geographers until 1040AH/1662CE when Al-Ayachi [55] visited it. This writer seems not to know the name of the site in his description of the city, saying: "then we departed and went by sea where we slept two nights on the way, and on the third night we came to Al-Jabiya [this could be just a variant for Ajdabiyah]. In this Al-Jabiya there are the remains of much architecture and great wells dug in stone, and massive constructions built with carved stone, and there is the site of an old mosque which was destroyed. We found engraved in some of its stones the date of construction to be the year three hundred [ie 300AH/922CE]" (Ayachi 1996, p.150, author's translation; Arabic

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[55] Al-Ayachi (1006AH/1628CE–1057AH/1679CE) was a well-known travel writer, poet and scholar from Morocco. He wrote a two volume about his journeys: Ma al-Mawaid (Table Water).

Appendix, passage 51). Al-Ayachi calls Ajdabiyah by the asymptotic name Al-Jabiya.

He clearly does not know the name Ajdabiyah. Perhaps he used a common local name

for the once great city.

The Italian doctor Agostino Cervelli in 1811-12 mentions a group of ancient buildings,

including the palace and the mosque (Cervelli 1922-23, pp.442-443). The French

explorer, Jean-Raymond Basho in 1824-25 drew an accurate picture of the mosque

as well as of the remains of the Fatimid palace (Basho 1827, pp.268-269). The English

traveller, James Hamilton, in 1852, described both palace and mosque with some

accuracy (Hamilton 1856, pp.173-175). However, the Englishman, Freund, in 1881

was the first Western traveller to provide an accurate and comprehensive description

of the Fatimid palace, remarking that: "the important monuments are located on a low

plateau which is about three rectangular rooms and parallel compartments with walls

built of limestone." He described what the roof of the palace looked like before its later

partial collapse, noted that the local people were using the stones for their own building

purposes, and predicted the probable disappearance of the palace as a consequence

(Freund 1912, pp.164-165).

5.3 Development of archaeological investigation

Ajdabiyah has been explored quite extensively from the 1950s onwards, especially

during the 1970s, and is probably one of the best known Islamic site of Libya (King

1989, p.196; Hardy-Guilbert 2010, pp.80-81). Unpublished papers in the Department

of Antiquities in Cyrene, made available to the present writer and transcribed in full in

Appendix 2, allow us to trace in some detail the early stages of the process by which

the importance of the site came to be recognised and investigation began.

5.4 Archaeological evidence

Whitehouse 1972-1973, p.23, contains the only published plan of the settlement (See Fig. 71).
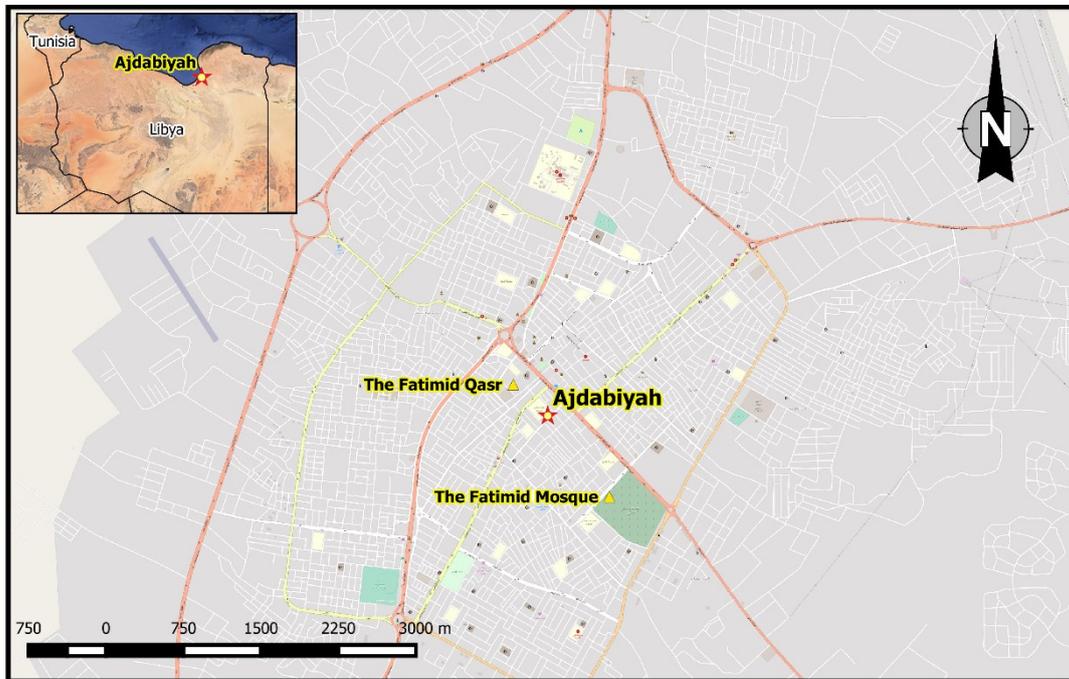
Fig. 71 The locations of The Fatimid Qasr and The Fatimid Mosque in Ajdabiyah (by Author elaborated from Google Earth).

The chief remains are the Qasr and the Mosque described below, and easily distinguished from each other, as will be shown (see 5.3.1 (see Fig. 72) and 5.3.2 (see Fig. 73); but also built at the same time for the same occasion, as for instance, the plaster decoration and carving of each shows: "The plaster decoration of the axial chamber of the qasr...bears a striking resemblance to the stucco found at the Ajdabiyah mosque. Likewise, the decorated squinches of the central hemi-dome, in the shape of half shells, are strongly reminiscent of the niches carved in the façade of the mosque's prayer hall (Bongianino 2015, p.178)"
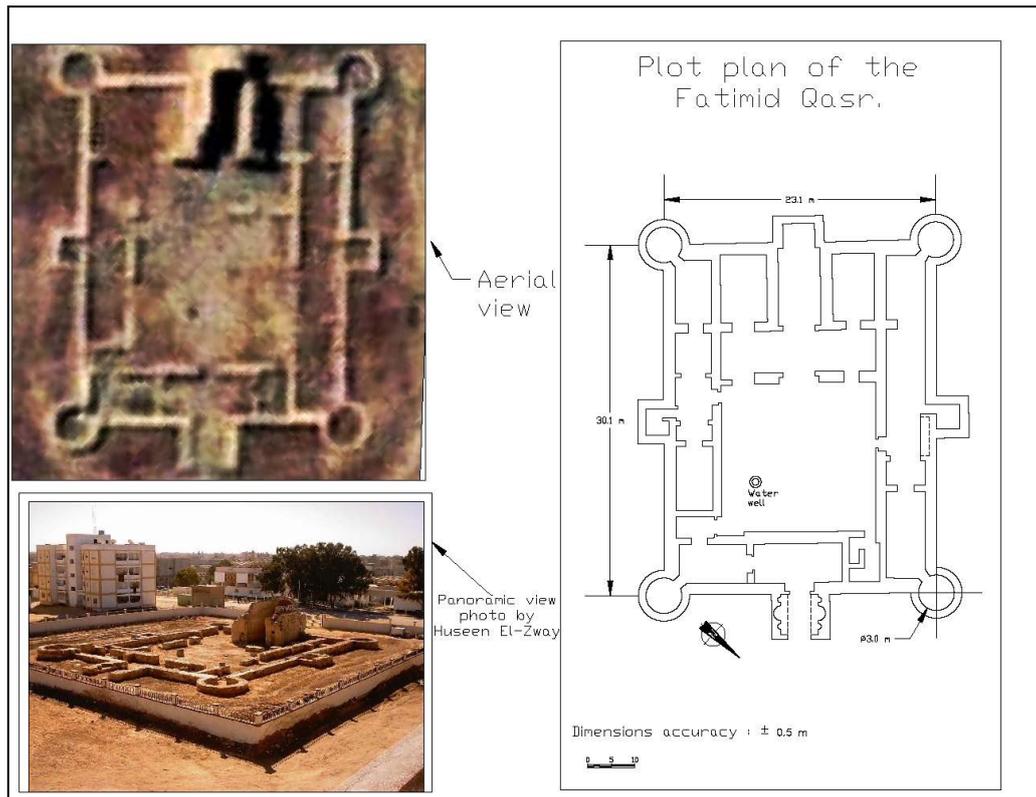
Fig. 72 Plan of the Fatimid Qasr in Ajdabiyah.
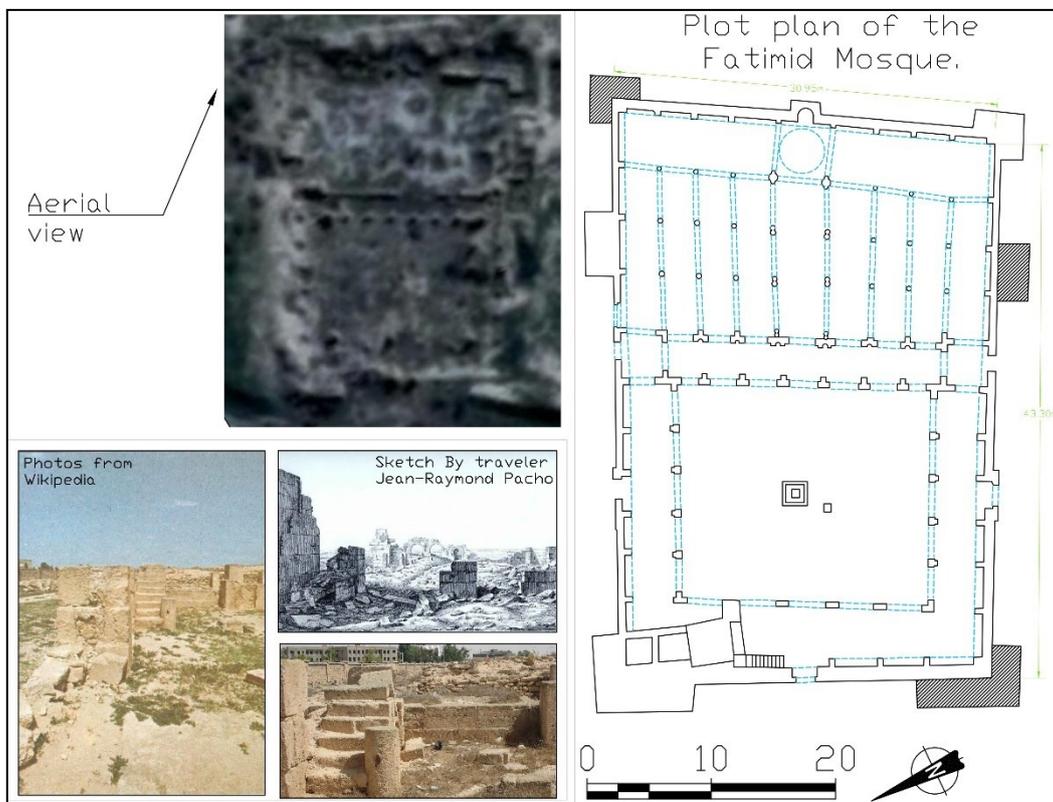
Fig. 73 Plan of the Fatimid Mosque in Ajdabiyah.

The qasr here described is commonly referred to the Fatimid period and it is considered as a unique example of the fortified structure in a provincial city a re-evaluation of other local, equally neglected monuments and finds (Bongianino 2015). There are also Roman inscriptions (see 5.4.4.2), part of the mud-brick city wall, several other forts, cisterns and wells, stucco decoration, some ordinary dwelling houses,and Roman and Islamic pottery which has been collected during excavations across the site (al-Hamid, pp.19-20). Of course, the remains of buildings on the one hand and small individual finds dug up in the process of investigation are different kinds of evidence, but it is hoped that the two kinds of evidence presented in this chapter will be seen to harmonise together in building up a general picture.

5.4.1 Forts (in particular, the main qasr)

The foremost archaeological building of Ajdabiyah is the fortress palace 'the main *qasr*' (See Fig. 74), and what we shall be concerned with here is a concentration on "the local significance" of this site, "rather than treating [it] as [one of] the products of an "official" Fatimid architecture, a concept that is too abstract to be useful for this case study" (Bongianino 2015, p.172).[56]

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[56] Bongianino's setting aside of the concept as "too abstract" is an interesting example of the parallel between his approach and the approach to Cyrenaican archaeology generally adopted in this thesis. The suggestion is that a much more detailed and precise understanding of the qasr here is to be arrived at by starting from its immediate context in the place where it was built than by starting from what is already a scholarly abstraction: the idea of official Fatimid architecture.

Fig. 74 Aerial view of The Fatimid Qasr in Ajdabiyah (by Author elaborated from Google Earth)

The earliest mention of the presence of the fortress palace in the city of Ajdabiyah is in the writing of Al-Bakri (11th century) and Al-Idrisi (12th century).Al-Yaqoubi writing earlier, at the end of the 9th century, does not mention any fort/palace(s) (See 5.2). He describes a walled city with a mosque and markets. 19th century travellers (see below) visiting Ajdabiyah saw a substantial building that they tended, wrongly as we shall see, to interpret as the remains of a church, a building dating that is to the pre-Islamic period (Romanelli 1943, p.17; fig. 31 p.243). However, the excavations carried out on the building in the 1950s and 1970s proved that the fortified palace (the *qasr*), which they thought was a Christian church belonged in fact to the Islamic period. We must certainly have in our minds at the outset, in considering the *qasr* at Ajdabiyah, a general comment on the theological significance to a Muslim believer of a *qasr*, to the effect that "a fortified palace (*qasr*) [is] indeed the dominant Psalter symbol of God", even when this is not "a tangible urban entity" (Tamari 1996, pp. x, xiii). But we must

also consider here whether there are reasons other than purely theological ones for the presence of this palace. Ajdabiyah does not seem a place for undiluted theology, as Baghdad or Cordova might have been. Ordinary forts in the Syrtica "were commonly built beside the major wells" (Ward-Perkins and Goodchild 2003, p.428), and Ajdabiyah is a good example of this.

The main fortified building on this site was first described by James Hamilton (see 5.2), who visited it in 1852. His description when more was visible than is now, is valuable primary evidence for the modern archaeologist, and as such needs to be quoted here verbatim, since much of what he saw is no longer to be seen. He describes the building as: "A castle of excellent character, which cannot be later than the third century of the Hejirah. It is a rectangular structure terminating in three chambers (see Fig. 75, Rooms 8, 9 & 10), the extremity of the centre of one of which has an octagonal niche, on which the plaster remains. This end is flanked by round, dome-covered towers, whose sides are perforated with loopholes for arrows; but neither within nor without, neither above nor below, could I discover ornament or inscriptions[57].

About thirty years later, in 1881, as is noted above, the same building was seen and described by G.A. Freund, with interesting additional detail: "The principal ruins are situated on a low hill and consist of three rectangular and parallel rooms (See Fig. 75, Rooms 8, 9 & 10), with walls constructed of large limestone blocks, well cut and cemented. The two external rooms were, as also the inner one, covered with vaults. The former spring from the outer rectangular wall, whilst the latter - the middle one - displays an octagonal apse. This is covered by a half-dome built up against the long vault of the central room (see Fig. 7, Room 9). The outer wall continues beyond these three rooms until it meets two circular rooms, with domes limiting the construction. The

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[57] (Hamilton 1856, p.173; Abdussaid 1964, p.116; Bongianino 2015, p.177 adds that "it is now possible to demonstrate that...the fortress-palace was indeed adorned with carved and moulded plaster, and probably featured an inscribed frieze"; see also 5.2)

dome of the tower to the left survives, whilst the right-hand one is destroyed. It appears that in correspondence with the axis of the central chamber a broad stairway leads to the hill, below the building itself (Freund 1912, pp.164-165)".

King describes the *qasr* as "a stone-built structure, with rubble core walls faced with ashlar" (King 1989, p.197); and Abdussaid provides a ground plan (see Fig. 75), reproduced here in the text, of what survives now, together with photographs (Abdussaid 1964). He describes briefly the main shape: "the fortress is rectangular, its curtain walls (exclusive of the projecting towers) measuring 33.5x25.5 metres...the gateway-tower projects 4.20 metres from the north wall of the Fortress, and is larger than the other towers...the inner courtyard...is a simple rectangle of 19x14.5 metres, with a well in its north-eastern part...galleries...flank the courtyard on east and west (See Fig. 75, Rooms 4 & 5)...the three chambers at the south end of the courtyard were vaulted and lofty" (Abdussaid 1964, p.117-118) (see Fig. 75, Rooms 8, 9 &10).
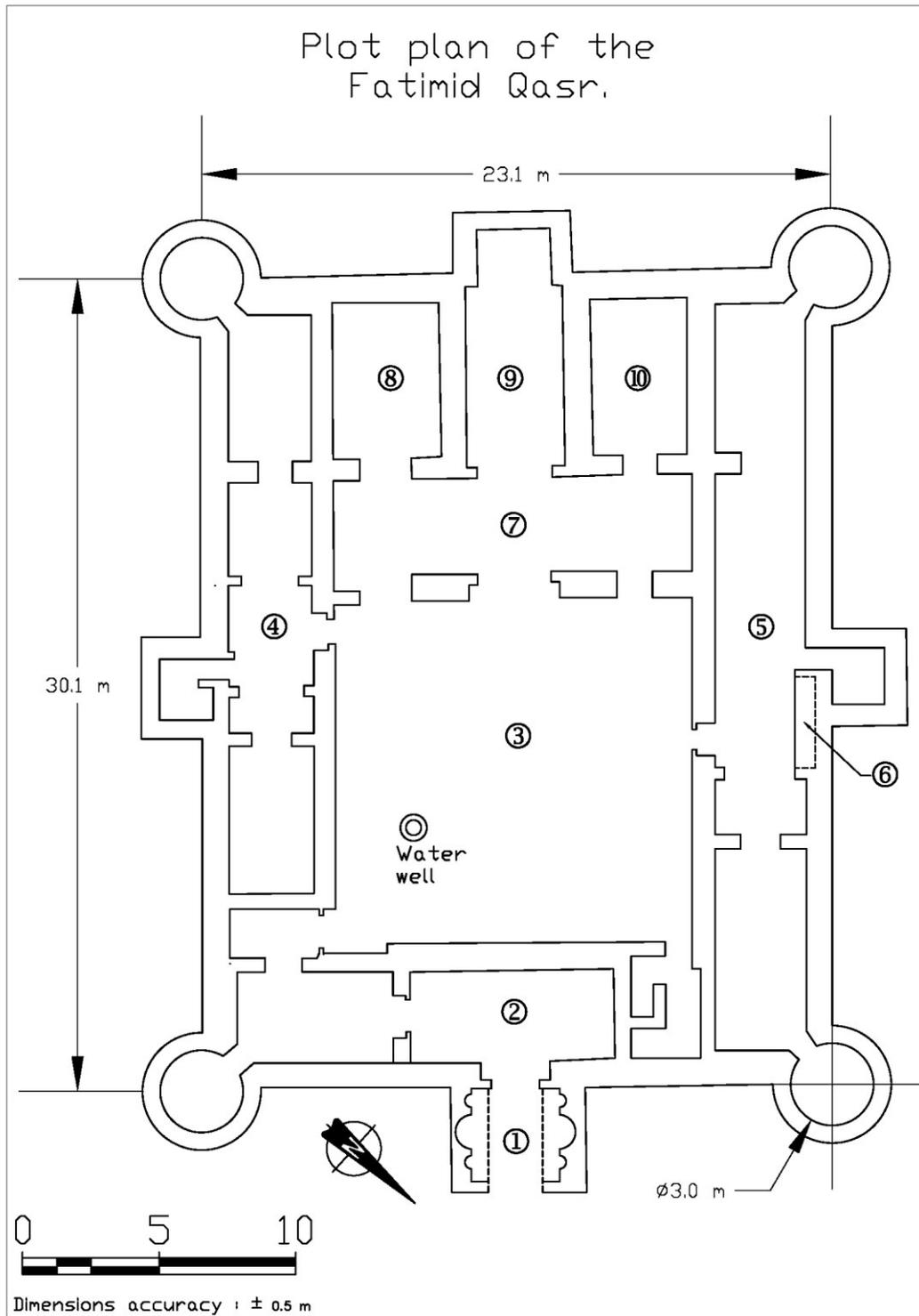
Fig. 75 The plan of the Fatimid Qasr. Drawing by: Abdulhamid Abdussaid, redrawn by Enas M. Bubtana

That this *qasr* was more than a simple fort, more than a frontier-barracks, even though fortification was its principal function, Abdussaid suggests, is made clear by the presence of the three vaulted chambers (see Fig. 75, Rooms 8, 9 & 10), and he speculates further that "it seems...likely that the fortress was constructed to serve as the residence...of the Arab governor of these Syrtic regions" (Abdussaid 1964, p.119). King comes to essentially similar conclusions, but more cautiously put: "On the south-west, side is the vaulted chamber (see Fig. 75, Room 9) which was the main element in a suite of rooms in a T-plan, the principal apartments of the ancient building. The T-plan suite of rooms was originally isolated from the central courtyard by a portico, which preceded it and screened it from the courtyard; to this extent, the main rooms enjoyed a degree of privacy from the more public courtyard. It seems that the vaulted chamber was an audience hall used by an official or other highly placed person, while the more modest chambers flanking the courtyard could have been used as barracks to accommodate the garrison (King 1989, p.197) (see Fig. 75, Rooms 4 & 5 and see Fig. 76).
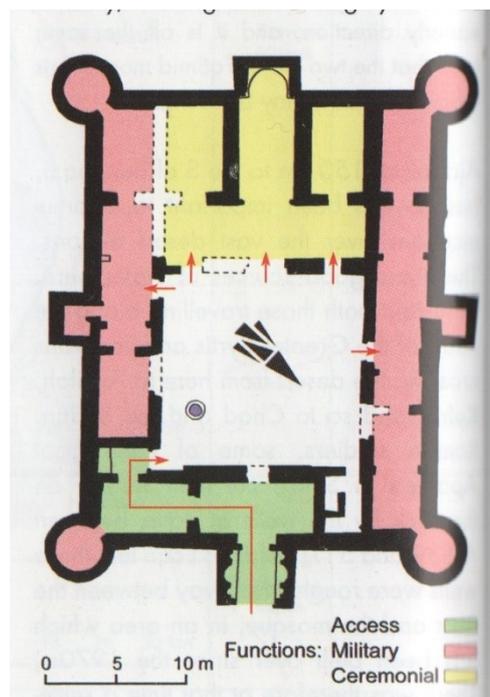
Fig. 76 The plan of the Fatimid Qasr (after Kenrick 2013, p.22).

Whitehouse has an interesting alternative suggestion: "The ['palatial'] (see Fig. 75, Room 9) suite is totally inadequate for permanent residence and the building, I suggest, was intended solely for temporary use...who was it for? Not, I think for the governor. Ajdabiyah, we know, had a resident governor and the qasr was not designed for a permanent occupant. It was intended, rather, for temporary use and the combination of an imposing 'military' façade, a large - indeed, disproportionately large - entrance and a palatial suite suggests that it was built for an important person, who would be treated with considerable ceremony. We have just one clue about his identity. Al-Tijani, the fourteenth century writer, maintains that the fourth Fatimid caliph, al-Mu'izz, who conquered Egypt in 969, ordered a series of rest houses to be built along his triumphal route from Tunisia to Cairo [this reference is not in Al-Tijani text; the information is in Ibn Saidi see above]. Was our building one of these qasr, hastily erected between 969 [347AH] and 972 [350AH], when the caliph entered Cairo?" (Whitehouse 1971-1972, p.21; see also Bongianino 2015, p.188).

That the *qasr* was a temporary building, not intended to fulfil a simple long-term purpose, is perhaps why certain of the features of its structure which seem to make for display on the one hand, and those which seem to be intended as defensive on the other, seem not to cohere with each other. It was not a building conceived as a whole, but rather a place to answer now to this and now to that purpose. Moreover, the lack of specific studies on the monument do not allow the identification of different phases of construction, which may have also seen the fort changing its function. It is likely that the monument may have had a defensive function at the beginning and may have changed later on to a more residential complex. Unfortunately, it is not possible to provide any specific suggestion on the chronologies of the life of the monument.

5.4.1.1 Some architectural observations on the qasr

The ground plan of the *qasr* suggests that the fort is typically a new Islamic construction. It is possible to parallel the structure with some evidence of the Umayyad architectural tradition, of the kind widespread in the area, and best exemplified perhaps in the *qasr* at Mashatt (Mshatta Palace (Qaṣr al-Mshattā) in Jordan (see Fig.77). Therefore the Umayyad period can be considered here a terminus post quem.
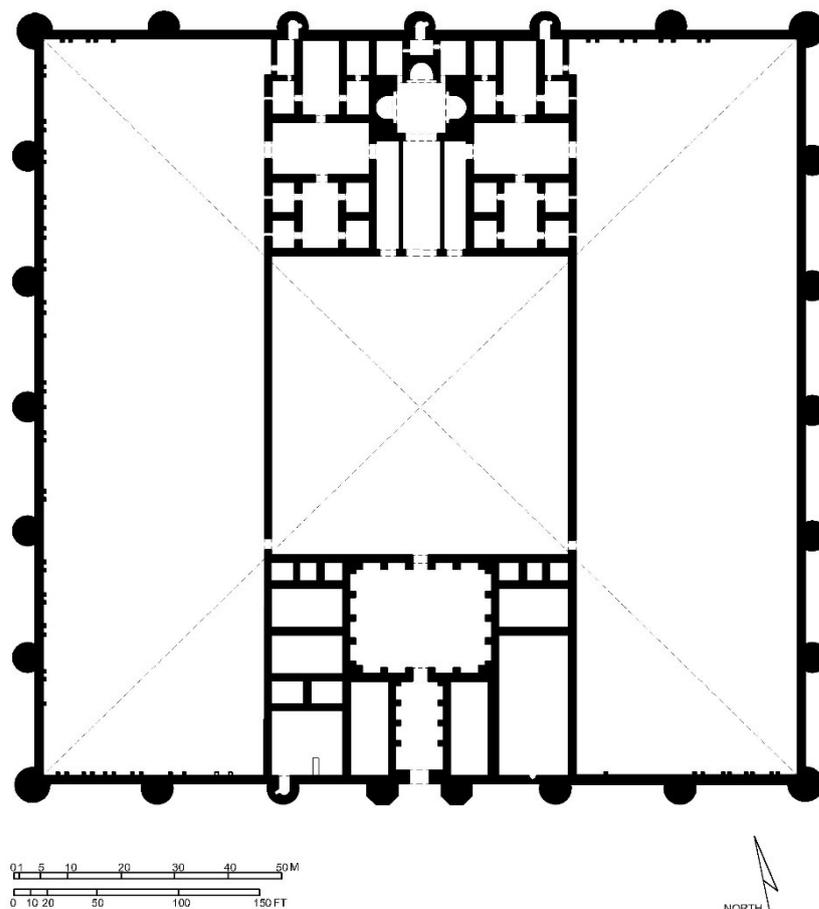
Fig. 77 Plan of The Mshatta Palace in Jordan (after Elmahmudi 2002).

There are resemblances, too, to the kind of design familiar in ribats, exemplified in those in Tunisia at Monastir and Sousse. There are a number of distinctive elements, which need some specific discussion (Whitehouse 1971-1972).

Firstly, the entrance area is very prominent (see Fig. 75, Rooms 1 & 2), about 80m^2 in area, with three associated rooms, taking up altogether more than one sixth of the

total floor space of the palace. The passage leading to it is bent and not straight. Such prominent, formal entrance areas appeared for the first time in Islamic architecture in the Minya *qasr (*Khirbet el-Minyeh)[58], which dates to the Umayyad period. This feature has connections with Byzantine architecture, as can also be observed in Abbasid palaces such as those at Ukhaydir[59] and Khan Atshan[60], dated around 160AH/762CE, i.e. the middle Muslim period. There is a monumental entrance also in the Mahdia mosque in Tunisia, dating from (302AH/924CE), which is very similar to the entrance to the Ajdabiyah qasr, in particular with the internal decoration with a semi-circular mishka (see Fig.78).

Fig. 78 Shell niche decoration from the fortress-palace of Ajdabiyah (after Blake, Hutt and Whitehouse 1971).

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[58] Minya qasr (Khirbet el-Minyeh): Small Umayyad palace located on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias). The palace is contained within a rectangular enclosure oriented north-south with round corner towers and semi-circular interval towers on the south-west and north sides. In the middle or the east side is the main gate formed by two projecting half-round towers separated by the arch of the gateway. See Petersen,1996, p.150; Creswell1969; Grabar et al 1960, pp.226–43.

[59] Ukhaydir palace: Early Abbasid palace in the desert of south-western Iraq built between 774-775 CE It is rectangular in shape of 176 M. Length and 146 M. width, includes the main hall, the big Iwan, the reception hall and the servant houses (see Bell 1914; Finnster and Schmidt 1976).

[60] Khan Atshan: Small palatial building in the Iraqi western desert between Ukhaidhir and Kufa . the building has a simple regular plan consisting of four circular solid corner towers with semi-round towers on three sides and an entrance set between two quarter-round towers on the north side. Internally the building appears to have an irregular plan with long vaulted halls along two sides and a small courtyard decorated with a façade of blind niches. The structure was probably built in the Umayyad period although it has previously been considered an Abbasid (post- 750 CE) construction. Petersen 1996, p.25.

Secondly the 'closets' side of the hallway should be noted, which occupies the whole of the longitudinal sector to the north-west (see Fig. 75, Rooms 2), and the major part of the south-eastern section (see Fig. 75, Rooms 8 & 10). These dark little rooms are accessed through a single entrance overlooking the arena, but free passage is allowed to the lateral towers, which can be reached through the ceiling by stairs (See Fig. 75, Rooms 4, 5 & 6). This part of the *qasr* occupies 200m^2, less than half the total floor space of the palace.

Thirdly, (See Fig. 75, Rooms 8, 9 & 10) it is possible to identify a central hall for meetings or receptions, with side chambers as living space, these chambers do seem to have been equipped in a way that suggests they were designed for permanent, settled use. Whitehouse suggests (Whitehouse 1971-1972, p.21) that they were temporary accommodation. It is worth noting that the 'triple room system', consisting of a middle T-shaped chamber (see Fig. 75, Room 9) with two small rooms at the sides (see Fig. 75, Rooms 8 &10), clearly for combinations of public and private meeting, was commonly used in Iraq, as in houses excavated at Samarra. Together with the monumental entrance. such arrangements are found not only in Iraq but also all over the Levant. It is very likely that Fatimid architectural styles were in this respect affected by the Abbasid style.

Fourthly, there is the roofing. The method and style of roofing in this Fatimid *qasr*, with domes and arches, as mentioned by Al-Bakri in his description of the city (Bakri 1857, pp.5-6), must indicate that ecological factors played here a decisive role. There was little timber in this area to be used for roofing purposes, so that the use of vaulting instead is easily explained, with domes and half-domes used to roof the three main rooms, the side rooms, and the towers (See Fig. 79, A, B & C).

Fig. 79A Ajdabiyah Palace, from a drawing by J.-R. Pacho in 1824, pl. XC.
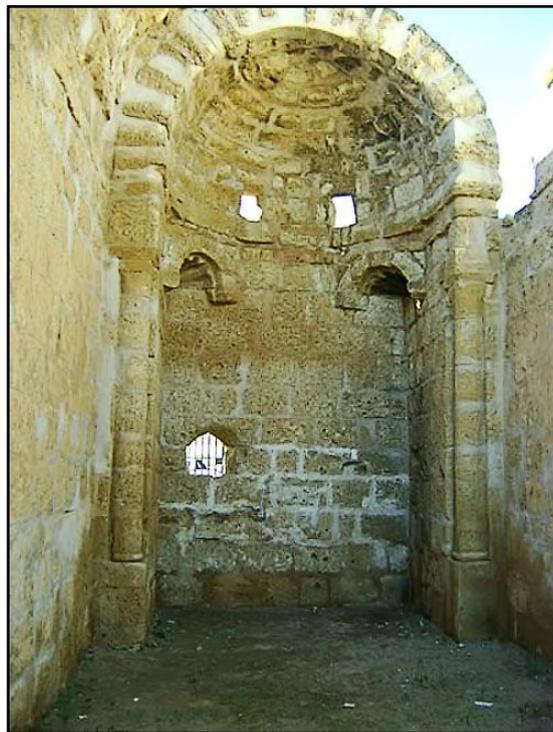
Fig. 79B The vaulted chamber in The Fatimid Qasr in Ajdabiyah (archive of the Dept. of Antiquities, Cyrene).

Fig. 79C The vaulted chamber in The Fatimid Qasr in Ajdabiyah (Archive of the Dept of Antiquities, Cyrene).

5.4.1.2 The date of the qasr and its function

Recent studies have been unanimous in suggesting that the palace dates back to the Fatimid period (287AH/909CE-549AH/1171CE) as is shown by the Fatimid inscriptions that were found there, which have been compared with inscriptions found at el-Merj. In addition, there are similarities between the Caliph Abu Al-Qasim Obeidallah mosque in Ajadabiya and the palace in some architectural elements and stucco decoration (Bongianino 2015, p.188).

Also, the building has a prominent entrance, typical of some areas of North Africa, and a crooked doorway of a kind found in the mosque of el Mahdia in Tunisia (this being the oldest example). The similarity of the prominent formal entrance, with its counterpart in el-Mahdia, is enough to suggest that the palace was built the year after the construction of the el-Mahdia mosque (see Fig. 79 C), which dates to 302AH/924CE.

One must rule out the idea that the palace is older, and dates to the pre-Fatimid era, as the mosque does, as there is no evidence to prove this hypothesis. In fact, this view derives from the English translation of Al-Yaqoubi when he is said to describe the city of Ajdabiyah thus (see 5.2): "and the city of Ajdabiyah the fort and the mosque and the markets." However, Al-Yaqoubi actually describes here not a fort but a walled city with a mosque and markets. He does not mention a fort; the Arabic text is quite clear that what is translated 'fort' in the standard version of this 9th century traveller actually is a word meaning a walled city (Al-Yaqoubi 1892, p.344, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 47).

It is clear from the architecture of the palace and its decoration that it was built for an important person. There is agreement among all investigators that it was in all probability built for the Fatimid Caliph Abu Tamim Ma'ad Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah, who ruled during the period 331AH/953CE-354AH/976CE. The Caliph was resident in Tunis, and sent his commander Jawhar Al-Siqilli to invade Egypt in 359AH/981CE (see Chapter 4, 4.1).

When Abu Tamim Ma'ad Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah decided to invade Egypt, he sent to his governors in Cyrenaica to instruct them to dig wells as is mentioned by Ibn Sa'id[61] in his *Book of the Extension of the Land in Longitudes and Latitudes*. Speaking of Ajadabiya, Ibn Said writes: "in Ajdabiyah, Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah made water tanks for the rain when he determined to open Egypt from Kairouan" (Ibn Said 1953, p.62, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 52).

Among the construction projects which he had ordered for his journey to Egypt was the palace in Ajdabiyah, and it seems likely that he stayed in (or made use of) this palace during his journey; although we must note Whitehouse's sense that the *qasr*

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[61] Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Mūsā ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī, (591AH/1213CE–664AH/1286CE), also known as Ibn Saʿīd al-Andalusī, was a geographer, historian, poet, and the most important collector of poetry from al-Andalus of the 12th and 13th centuries.

was not in the full sense habitable (Whitehouse 1971-1972, and see 5.4.1); and perhaps even have in mind part of the discussion in 1.1 (about the uneasy relationship early Muslim Arabs had with the whole idea of cities and city life, as contrasted with life in tents), and the attitude there expressed by the 7th century Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab, admittedly three hundred years previously, that "the tents and camp life are more useful to your men than your walls and healthier to their bodies than your roofs" (Alsayyad 1996/2, p.99).

Ibn Dinar notes the stay in Ajdabiyah, saying that Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah "...left Al-Mu'izz from Gabes (361AH/983CE), and entered Tripoli, and departed for Tripoli, on the way to Sirte ......, and left Sirte and descended to his palace which was built in Ajdabiyah, then he departed from Ajdabiyah and descended to his palace known as Al Muezaya[62] in Barqa , until he reached Alexandria ... "(Ib-Dinar 1967, p.62, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 22) (see Fig. 80).

Fig. 80 A map showing the route of Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah Fatimid from Gabes in Tunisia to Alexandria (compiled from the written account of Ib-Dinar)

The year in which Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah began to prepare for the conquest of Egypt and sent to his governors ordering them to establish guest houses and water cisterns can be determined as falling between 359AH/981CE and 361AH/983CE. The first year is the date of the invasion by Jawhar al-Siqilli of Egypt, and the second year is the date

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[62] Al Muezaya: the name of the second qaṣr of the Caliph Fatimid Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah.

of arrival of Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah in Cairo. It was natural that after Egypt was opened to Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah, he should be thinking of establishing himself there; and he evidently sent to his governors ordering them to build their own resting places for him as he travelled, such as the palace in Ajdabiyah and the Al Quezada Palace in Burqa and others.

We may say then, with some assurance, that the *qasr* of Ajdabiyah was built at the orders of the Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah Fatimid between 359AH/981CE and 361AH/983CE, for him to use temporarily during his journey from Tunisia to Egypt. This would explain why it is clearly a fortified place as well as being in a style of architecture appropriate to the likely luxurious expectations of the Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah.

Although by the 10th century, the early Islamic sense that utter simplicity of nomadic life was appropriate for a believer in the Muslim faith, and particularly for a soldier, had given way to more elaborate notions, the city of Ajdabiyah was not, clearly, the place for such elaborate notions, nor indeed the whole of Cyrenaica. The Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah was passing through, however, and as it were he carried with him a sort of portable architectural significance. This important building made for him precisely did not establish the importance of the city but was only a tangential 10th century kind of reference to the importance of the man passing through.

Bongianino also argues that the evidently "symbolic rather than utilitarian purpose" of the building makes it "questionable to simply regard it as one of the fortresses established by Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah along the coastal route" (Bongianino 2015, p.188), and suggests "in accordance with David Whitehouse", that it is instead "a palatial rest house along his triumphal route from Ifriqiyya to Egypt" (Bongianino 2015, p.189), and also that it is "likely that the fortress-palace at Ajdabiyah was only one of

a series of caliphal pavilions built in a short period of time along the Libyan coast" (Bongianino 2015, p.190). One might indeed suppose, certainly, that the building was important, but that the need it answered did not last very long, and that a building with a long-term purpose would have a more 'settled' and firmly decided overall character. The formal entrance area is large and open, about 80m^2 in size. That is, about one sixth of the total floor space of the building is not easily defensible, and yet the corridor to the inside of the building is bent in the way usual as a defence against surprise attack (Bongianino 2015, p.187). The three rooms that are grouped round the entrance area are formal and expressive, but the rooms round the courtyard are small and dark, as though the building doubled as sometimes palace, sometimes barracks.

The argument might run that the *qasr* at Ajdabiyah was a grand response to a temporary situation, that it 'gestured' with easy incoherence towards a number of desired 'realisations' of itself, of military might, of ceremonial presence, that it was, essentially, not a steady response to some long-term felt need, was not concerned with the life of the people who lived in the city and were going for a long time to go on living there. It was built by al-Muizz "outside the walled city so as to keep himself aloof from the inhabitants of Ajdabiyah" (Bongianino 2015, p.189); and so, in a strange way, elaborate and striking though it is as an archaeological relic, it is important to this thesis precisely because of its *irrelevance* to Ajdabiyah. This thesis is concerned with, and finds more important, the *ordinary* lives lived long-term in the cities under consideration in Cyrenaica. "Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah endowed with some of the finest architectural achievements of the early Fatimid period an apparently marginal region of semi-desert, which only for a few decades came to play a crucial role in the realisation of his political ambitions" (Bongianino 2015, p.190). He no doubt soon forgot presiding in the *qasr* at Ajdabiyah; and presumably the inhabitants of the city soon forgot him.

In continuing the investigation of the site, then, one should not proceed in what might be thought a conventional way. Ordinarily, what is plainly an important and authoritative building is held, almost automatically, both to derive its importance from and to confer its importance upon its physical context. There is, as it were, a plain two-way relationship between what it gives to and what it takes from its surroundings. If the suggestion is correct that the *qasr* at Ajdabiyah was built for the Caliph on his way to Egypt, then we should expect it to draw little from its fixed surrounding context and to contribute only indirectly and at second hand to that context.

After the Caliph left, it was a major building in, or rather just outside, the city which had no function; but which, of course, could not be altered greatly, and probably could not be quietly put to other lesser use without some difficulty: something like the Millenium Dome downstream on the River Thames with which the then government of the UK celebrated the year 2000, soon over, soon forgotten. The various possibilities, then, would have been to do nothing with it at all, or to find a subsidiary use for it as it stood, or to modify it physically in an unobtrusive way. There must have been discussion about what could be done.

It might seem likely that the Caliph, just like his troops, had brought with him the ways and means of being accommodated on the long journey to Egypt, so there was never the thought that either the entrance hall and associated rooms or the side chambers of the *qasr* might ever actually be lived in. The Caliph needed only a place in which to preside, not to reside. Perhaps its 'presiding' function might (cautiously?) have been used, at least after a short while, after the 'presence' of the Caliph had faded, by the resident governor. Perhaps, even, there came to be a resident governor at Ajdabiyah because there was somewhere for him to sit. The side chambers seem more of a problem, though. They may in the first instance, when they were first constructed, have

been no more than a 'form of decoration', a rounding out of the building suggestive of substantial function for it. They seem too small and inconvenient for a barracks, and in any case troops on the move do not need a barracks; and they seem too close to being habitable to be merely for storage. The suggestion might be that they never, unlike the 'presence' rooms, had any function at all, again rather like the Millennium Dome, which was built before anyone could think of anything for it to be a dome over. And if from the beginning they had no function, perhaps they were just left functionless thereafter. Small closed rooms used for nothing would be less embarrassing than a large imposing enclosed space used for nothing.

Finally, it cannot be ruled out that the position of the structure was intentional, to provide support to both peoples, the ones living in the urban area and the ones living in the countryside. The structure needed to be of easy reach to both communities. The monumentality of the structure was certainly related with the intention to represent the power of the new chief and therefore had to be visible to everyone. The peripheral location may also have been related to the availability of space. The structure had to be built rapidly and a choice in an area already free from buildings must have been necessary.

More excavation work of a highly detailed kind on the small rooms might seem, in any case, more interesting for an attempt to reconstruct what was going on, than excavation in the main presence area. The smallest evidence of any human activity going on in the side chambers, and when, might tell us a great deal about the finer detail of life in the city.

5.4.2 The mosque

"Although no church has been found [at Ajdabiyah], Al-Bakri states that in his time (11th century.) its inhabitants were all Copts by religion" (Al-Bakri 1857, pp.5-6, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 49) (Ward-Perkins and Goodchild 2003, p.428). If the city was wholly or predominantly Coptic Christian in the 11th century, it almost certainly was also in the 10th century, when the Fatimid Caliph Muizz not only built the *qasr* but also presumably the mosque, the remains of both of which buildings survive. As discussed above the qasr was dated to the Fatimid period and the same chronology has been suggested for the mosque (King 1989, p.197). Both the buildings preserve similar decorative scheme, with the presence of stuccos. This evidence seems to support the idea of a contemporaneity between them (Blake, Hutt, Whitehouse 1970, p.111) (see Fig. 81)
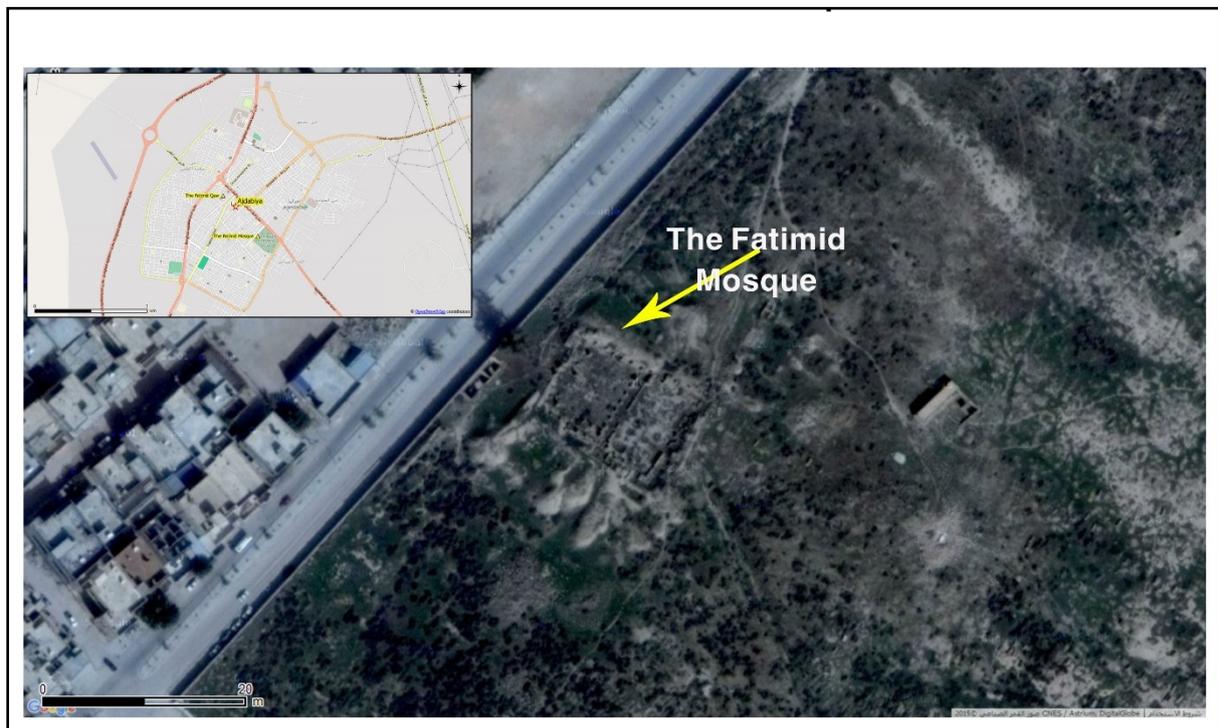
Fig. 81 Aerial view of The Fatimid Mosque in Ajdabiyah (by Author elaborated from Google Earth).

The mosque, then, as it survives visibly now, can be dated to the 10th century, and

we may suppose that it was built for the same reason as the *qasr*. The sense, then, sketched out in the previous section of this chapter, that the reason for the building of the *qasr* had to do with the passage of the Fatimid caliph through the city, and not to do with the city itself, is now strengthened by the description of the whole population as having itself no use for this mosque, which is located in the old cemetery, called Sidi Hasan, to the south-east of the contemporary city. It was recorded in the 19th century by the French traveller Pacho (Pacho 1827, pp.268-269), who visited the city in 1824 and drew a picture of the mosque as he saw it (see Fig. 82). The archaeological excavations described above in this chapter, begun by the department of antiquities in 1954 and continued in the 1970s, have established the details of the grand plan of the mosque (see Fig. 83).
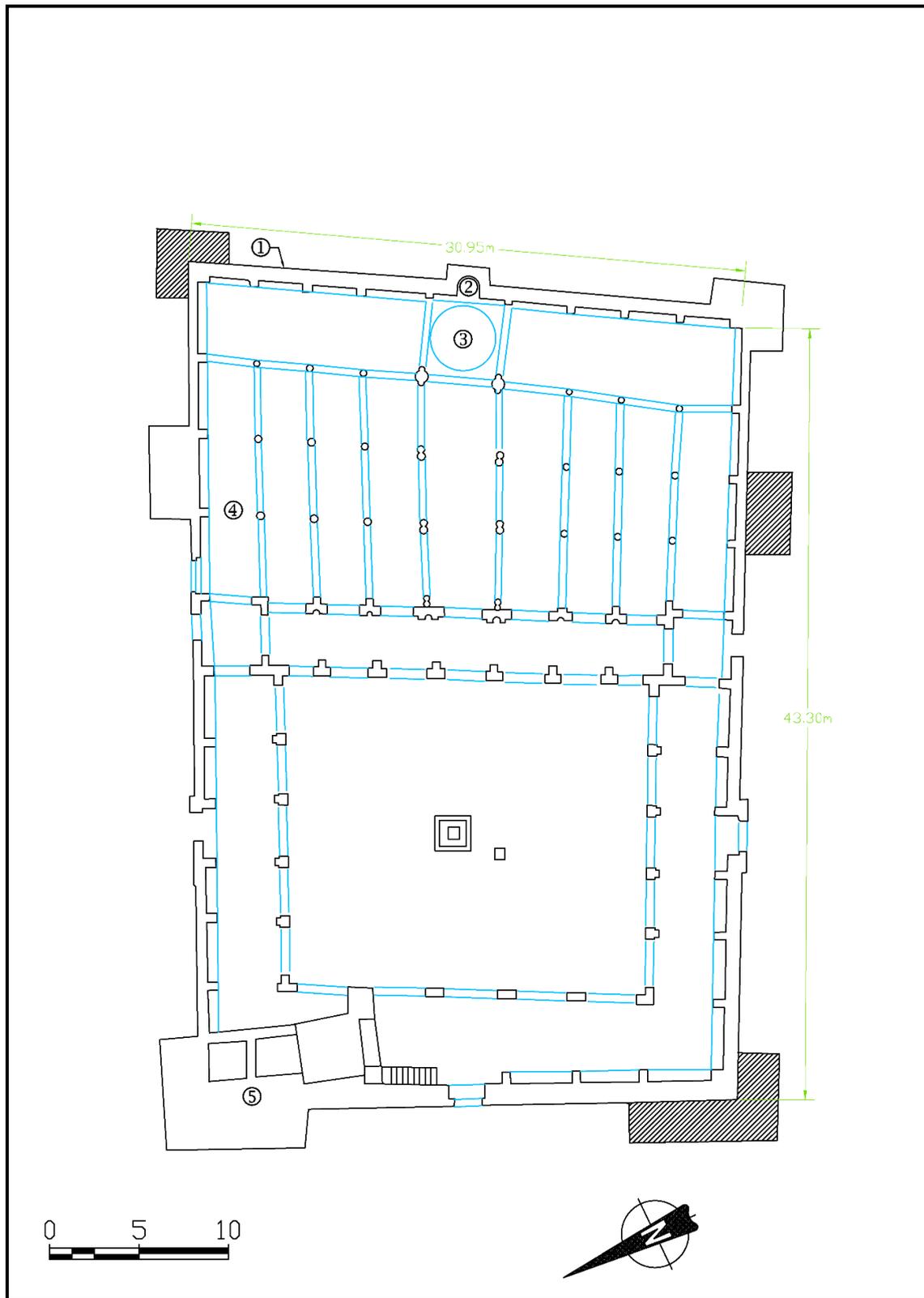
Fig. 82 The grand plan of the Fatimid Mosque Qasr. Drawing by: Abdulhamid Abdussaid. Redrawn by Enas M. Bubtana.

What is plainly visible, then, is of Fatimid origin; but there is also evidence from written

sources of an earlier mosque on the site of the one now visible. Little is known about

this supposed earlier structure — the Jama Sahnoun, where Imam Sahnoun is said to have taught.[63] It has disappeared almost completely beneath the later. It had rubble foundations and a mortar floor, seems to be of pre-Fatimid date, and is the earliest Islamic structure so far found on the site (Whitehouse 1972-1973, p.22). This earlier mosque, one imagines, met the needs of that small part of the population of the city that was Muslim, and it must be the building described by Al-Yaqoubi in the 9th century: "the city of Ajdabiyah, a walled city with a mosque and market places…." (Al-Yaqoubi 1892, p.344, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 47).

The Grand Mosque erected by the Caliph Al-Muizz, by contrast, was built in limestone and mudbrick. The structure was characterised by a central courtyard (as typical of congregational mosques) with a portico on all the sides and a minaret to the left of the entrance. The mosque probably had a T-shaped plan (King 1989, p.198; Blake, Hutt, Whitehouse 1970, p.108). Photographs of the minaret, probably taken about 1934. show the top of the square base and the first two courses of an octagonal shaft. In the sahn, the sanctuary façade consisted of a series of piers, decorated on the outward face with semi-circular niches. The columns of the nave had three elements: two circular shafts resting directly on the floor and a third column standing on a rectangular base. It soon became clear that the bases were not original. They had been placed in holes cut in the white plaster floor and were held in position with distinctive grey mortar. The mihrab itself was a deep concave niche. It was flanked by engaged columns. The outer walls were supported by massive buttresses. With its heavily buttressed walls, the building recalls the external appearance of the Great Mosque at Qairawan, which was buttressed at frequent intervals (Whitehouse 1971-1972, pp.15-17; see also

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[63] Imam Sahnun ibn Sa'id ibn Habib at-Tanukhi (160AH/782CE–240AH/862CE), a Muslim scholar, came from Levant to the African in 191AH/813CE and lived in Ajdabiyah, and taught the Islamic knowledge (the Maliki school) in its mosque for three years.

Marcais 1947; Sauvaget 1947; Marcais 1954; Lambert 1956; Grabar 1968; Cresswell 1969; Shaglouf 1976; Bloom 1985; Bloom 1989; Cresswell 1989; Bloom 1993; Walmsley 2005; Bongianino 2015) (see Fig. 84).

Fig. 83 Ajdabiyah Mosque, part of the staircase of the minaret (Photo from the archive of the Dept. of Antiquities, Cyrene).

The octagonal minaret of the mosque is a particularly important feature:[64] for it offers an origin for the Egyptian minaret tradition that developed in Fatimid times. It also confirms the eleventh-century account of Al-Bakri who commented on the octagonal minaret of the Ajdabiyah mosque. This major new information may be taken to explain the shape of the south-western minaret in the mosque of al-Hakim in Cairo of AD 990-1013, which in turn contributed to the evolution of the Mamluk period minaret tradition. Whether it originated in Libya is unclear, but it may well have arisen in the period

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[64] Bongianino writes: "the octagonal base of the minaret was still standing in the 1930s (an image is published in Ferri 1925-1926), and was probably destroyed during the Second World War" (Bongianino 2015, p.172, n1); but Whitehouse's account here seems more reliable.

before the Fatimids took Egypt and to that extent the octagonal form may be taken to be North African in origin (King 1989, p.198; Bakri 1857).

Some scholars have suggested that the Fatimid mosque did not have towers (Bongianino 2015, p.172; Bloom 1989/2013, pp.138-142); the evidence here recorded clearly disproves this evidence. In ground plan, this mosque is not different from other early Islamic mosques, especially in North Africa, it recalls the great congregational mosque of Qairawan (see Fig. 85), by which it was influenced. Also in this case, the T-plan is clear. The size of the mosque seems to indicate that it had primarily a symbolic function, built on the example of Kairouan. The mosque was probably too large for the population of the city, but its function was at this stage primarily representative.

Just as the evidently important building, the *qasr*, is not upon examination to be explained in simple terms in Ajdabiyah, so it is with the apparently important mosque in the city, which seems in the construction of its minaret to have been so authoritative and significant as to have provided the pattern for a style which later developed in Egypt. We learn from Al-Bakri that in the 11th century, all the inhabitants of the city were still Coptic Christians, that is, followers of that kind of Christianity persecuted under the former Byzantine rule;[65] and this sits uneasily with the construction of a major mosque in the 10th century on the site of an even earlier, pre-Fatimid mosque mentioned by Al-Yaqoubi in the 9th century (Al-Yaqoubi 1892, p.344, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 47).

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[65] See Chapter 1, n5.
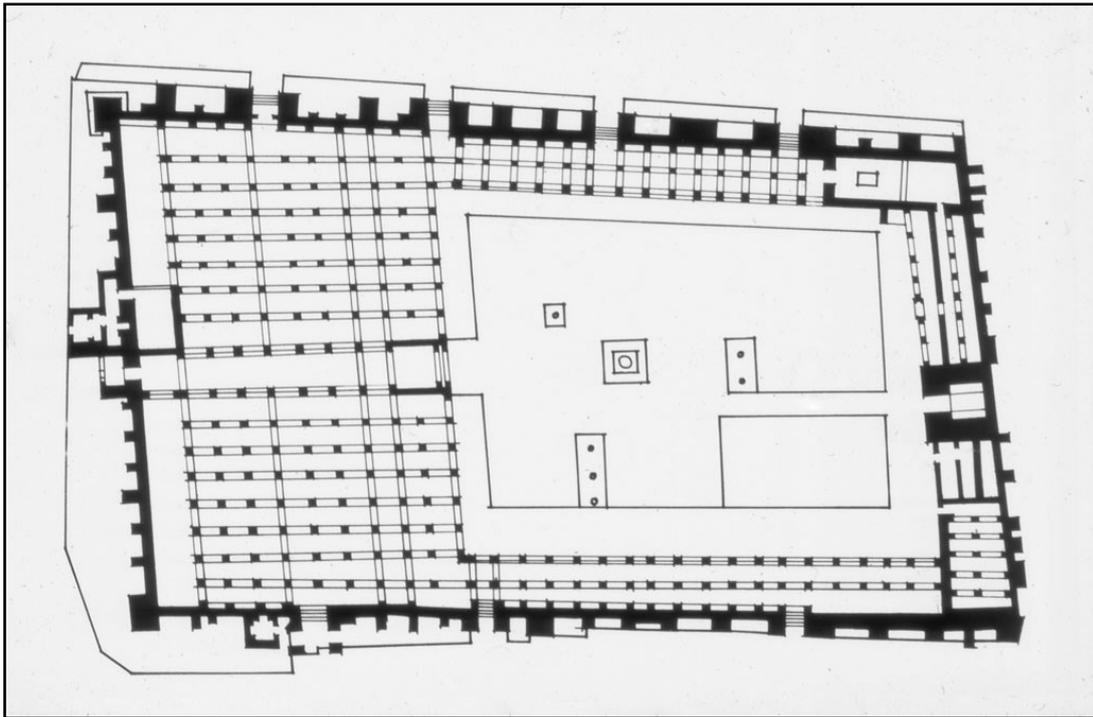
Fig. 84 Ground plan of the Great Mosque in Al- Qairawan Tunisia (after Elmahmudi 2002).

The picture that emerges can be understood, however, as confirming the explanation given above of the *qasr*. It is easy to suppose that the passage through Ajdabiyah towards Egypt of the Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah would have involved not only the construction of a celebratory and formal 'place of presiding' for him, which indicated, as it were, not very much beyond geographical convenience for the city itself; but that it also would have involved the equally ceremonial rebuilding of the rather small mosque already found there. Just as the *qasr* was in excess of what was required as soon as the Caliph left, so with the great mosque. We are not to suppose that, in the time following the Islamic victory in Cyrenaica, Ajdabiyah had become a significant centre of fervent conversion to the new faith, any more than it was a fervent adherent to the Byzantine Christianity of the previous rulers who had sailed away across the sea when the Arabs came. By the 9th century, there was a small mosque, for the convenience of that part of the population which was Muslim by conviction when it moved into the city, or for that part of the population which had embraced the new

religion. But as late as the 11th century, if we are to credit the report of Al-Bakri, "all the inhabitants of the city" were still Coptic Christians, as they had been when the Byzantine rulers left.

Ajdabiyah was a cosmopolitan place, which took a temporary impress from the passage through it of the important political and military activity of the Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah, but which essentially was used to large numbers of less important visitors, which it welcomed, and to which it responded with flexibility and ease. We are perhaps to suppose from Al-Bakri's description that the resident population of the city in the 11th century was more or less entirely Coptic, but that many traders and travellers came and went who were of other beliefs. For the Muslims among them, a small mosque might have been built early on; but, rather interestingly, the locals themselves do not seem to have gone in for formal, architectural expression of their own Coptic belief. It is hazardous, of course, to rely on negative evidence; but no Christian church has been found in the already extensive archaeological investigation of the city.

5.4.3 Pottery

Pottery findings from Ajdabiyah, are very limited. This is why it is now of great importance to consider the pottery in this site, even though: "The total amount of pottery from the excavations [at Ajdabiyah] was small, especially when compared with the enormous quantities from similarly sized Roman North African excavations, and comprised 6800 sherds in very fragmentary condition. The bulk of this pottery was from the surface accumulation over the 10th century CE. Fatimid mosque, deposited after the mosque ceased to be used as such. The date for this is unclear...much of the pottery may date to 11th and 12th centuries CE. The bulk of the glazed wares were polychrome and similar to those from excavations at El-Medeinah. Other glazed

pottery included miscellaneous tin glazed wares and one example of sgraffiato ware: there were no examples of lustre ware (Riley 1982, p.85)."

Lead-glazed pottery, "decorated in brown, green and yellow" belonging to a type manufactured in "the eastern Maghrib and Sicily, with exports on the mainland of Italy" in the 11th and 12th centuries, is distinctly paralleled in the finds from Ajdabiyah (Blake, Hutt, Whitehouse 1970, p.111-112). What is surprising, however, is: "the absence of typical Egyptian wares; we did not see a single fragment of Fatimid lustre ware, pottery with decoration under an alkaline glaze or Mameluk sgraffiato [see above 'one example of sgraffiato ware']. If the small sample is typical, the commercial contacts of Tripoli, Sort and even Ajdabiyah in the eleventh century and later were not with Cairo and Alexandria, but with the Maghrib. Pottery produced in the Maghrib is found all over [the] central Mediterranean, whither it was carried in either Muslim vessels or in the vessels of European merchants from such cities as Pisa, Genoa and Marseilles (Blake, Hutt, Whitehouse 1970, p.113)."

There is the sense, first of all, that when the Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah passed through Ajdabiyah on his way towards Egypt, he left the city behind. This was not the beginning of a political or trading route to the wealth and power of the east; and when the Fatimids were established in Egypt, their attention was focussed there and not on a small city en route from North Africa. Instead, Ajdabiyah remained where it had always been, linked in with the common and usual patterns of life in the central Mediterranean.

Most of the pottery found was in an accumulation over the surface area of the Fatimid mosque; pottery perhaps from the 11th and 12th centuries. At some point in the medieval period, then, the mosque became a dumping ground and ceased to be a place of worship. Perhaps, as I have suggested above, the use of the mosque was

never, after the Caliph left, of a kind to be justified by its architectural claims. Al-Bakri, it is true, mentions the mosque in the 11th century, but he also indicates that the settled inhabitants of the city were Coptic Christians. At some point when the city was in process of changing from being a thriving commercial centre, with many visitors; and was turning into the collection of small farms with no wall left, with two palaces isolated in the desert, and mostly Jewish or Muslim traders in the now un-walled centre, described by Al-Idrisi in the 12th century, there might have been a clearing of land for farming where before there had been dwelling places, probably of mud brick. One of the places at which a local accumulation of pottery cleared from land now to be used for agriculture might steadily more and more be dumped, would perhaps have been the virtually deserted mosque. The mosque would not have been a building actually to demolish, but might have been a place steadily more convenient for dumping, probably precisely because it was not being demolished and turned into fields.

As discussed in the previous chapter the Islamic pottery cannot be compared to the pottery circulating in the Roman period, for at least two reasons. The first is that the our knowledge on the early Islamic pottery is very limited. The second is, as discussed in chapter 5, that pottery appeared after the Islamic conquest to stop being a greatly traded item, and therefore a decrease in pottery finding has to be expected.

5.4.4 Coins and inscriptions

We turn now to the kinds of written remains that survive in coins and in inscriptions.

5.4.4.1 Coins

Two coins have been found dating from the 8th to the end of the 9th centuries, one in copper the other in bronze, the first of these found on the surface of the cemetery surrounding the mosque (Hardy-Guilbert 2010, p.81; Bauden 2016, p.393); and recently Bauden has established the existence of a mint at Barqa from roughly the

beginning of the 8th century that seems to have produced coinage for local use in Cyrenaica during the whole succeeding period of the early Islamic occupation to the time of the Fatimids (see above in chapter 3, 3.3.4.1). It was previously thought that there was practically no circulation of coinage in the whole region (Bauden 2016, p.387-412; and see also 3.3.4). The twelve coins studied by Bauden do certainly change the numismatic picture for Cyrenaica in general to some considerable degree, but it still seems possible to be surprised that, in Ajdabiyah for instance, evidence of a flourishing local life derived from other sources, with many travellers and merchants, should have produced only two coins for the whole city during the whole of our period. Given the commercial importance of the city, it is very likely that the limited number of coins is related to the condition of the findings and the excavation, it is also possible that some of the commerce was carried out by barter.

5.4.4.2 Inscriptions

A more conventionally important set of data, perhaps, related to the pre-Islamic and Islamic occupation of Ajdabiyah is epigraphic. The earliest inscriptions of all found on the site, cut into the rock-surface near the wells, attest the presence of "Roman soldiers of Syrian origin" (Abdussaid 1964, p.115) and date from the 1st century (Whitehouse 1971-1972, p.13), but it is with the medieval epigraphy that we are concerned. Fragmentary inscriptions have been found from the *qasr* and the mosque. Some of the decorated plasterwork with epigraphic remains on it clearly has some 'official' character; and some inscriptions are more personal memorials to individuals. Official decoration and epigraphy are fairly easy to recognise: "In the 1930s, during the Italian occupation of Libya, several fragments of medieval reliefs were photographed at Ajdabiyah. Their provenance was not recorded, but their style and subject indicate that they belonged to the *qasr* rather than the mosque. One of them

represents a lion *passant*, quite crudely executed under a plaster band of heart-shaped palmettes. This appears to be a particularly fitting decoration for a fortress-palace, conveying an idea of authority and power to the visitors" (Bongianino 2015, p.177).

Three other 'official' inscriptions between them probably give us the name of the caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah as the man who had the *qasr* (and thus also the mosque, see 5.4) built (see Bongianino 2015, pp.178-182 for following quotations about the 'official' inscriptions). The first, "discovered in the museum of Cyrene" in 1971 by Nicholas Lowick and found "in the vicinity of the fortress-palace in the 1950s... [consists of] the words '*min ma ama*[*ra*]', ie '...what was ordered by...'"; (See Fig. 86).

The Text and Translation:

 [...min mā ama[ra],....]

[....[ﺭ—]ﺍﻣــــﺎ ﻣـــــﺎ ﻣـــــﻦ..]

It is a very similar style of foliated Kufic, found "at Barqa, in 1936, [by]. Italian settlers" and "now at the Tolmeitha museum, must have come from an important building sharing numerous similarities with the fortress-palace of Ajdabiyah": it reads "'*amara*

bi-hi...', ie 'this was ordered by...' [and continues with the name of the patron] ...'*Tamim Al-Mu*['*izz*]', namely the fourth Fatimid caliph, Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah."

Fig. 85 Foundation inscription discovered in the fortress-palace in Ajdabiyah (after Abdussaid 1964)

The second official' inscription, on a series of related fragments of stone, dated 210 AH (822 CE) or 220 AH (832 CE) was found at the Fatimid mosque in the 1950s, it was stored in store at Ajdabiyah. The inscription is on stone in a relief etching style, and is written in a simple Kufic script. It is probably to be placed at the beginning of 2nd century AH. There is a diagonal break in the middle of the stone, but the fragments fit neatly together and there is no loss of text. The right hand edge is cut, but the left is damaged with some loss of text. The text is missing on both sides (See Fig. 87 A & B).

The Text and Translation:

 [...the age of [ten] or [twenty] and [two] or [??three] hundred...]

[....] [مائتين او ثلاثمائه] [ه – ين] [حمور سنه عشر]...]

The remaining text is three words that are part of the month and year. The inscription is written in Kufic script on a piece of stone. The other part of the inscription, which gives the number in the hundreds, and therefore there are two possibilities, either reading (210 or 220 AH or 310 or 320AH.) However, it is clear that the date is from the 3rd century AH and not the 4th century AH 210 or 220 AH, because the style of engraving we see here was not known at the beginning of the 8th century (i.e. 2nd century AH). The earliest examples of Kufic relief script on stone, found in Egypt and the oldest examples written in raised Kufic script on stone as in this inscription are found in Egypt dated to (203 AH / 818 CE) (Basha 1977, p113). There are also other examples of about the same date from the city of Ajdabiyah itself a gravestone currently preserved in the Cyrene store dated to (205 AH / 827 CE) whose similarity to the Tolmeitha inscriptions is strikingly evident in the style of writing in the following letters:Hā (   ), Alha (   ),Alsayn (   ),Mim (/   )and Aleaayn

       .
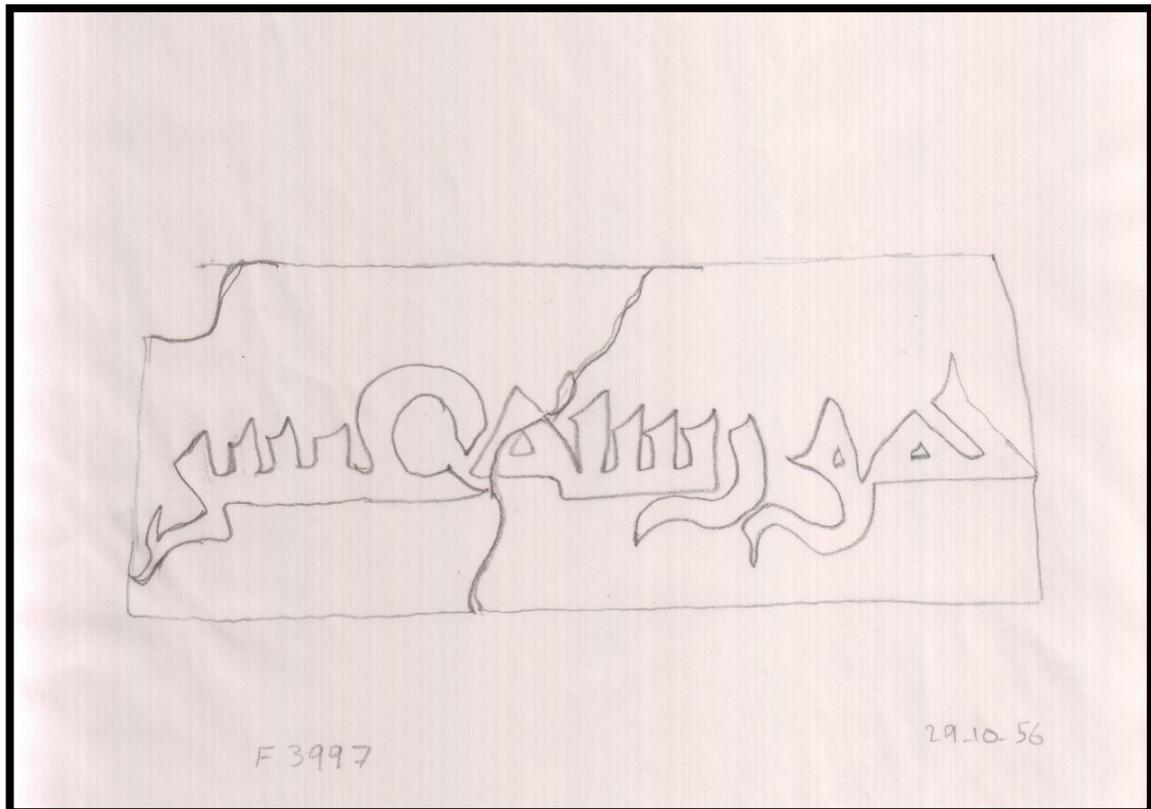
Fig. 86A&B Foundation inscription from the first phase of the Fatimid mosque at Ajdabiyah, bearing the date (2)10 or (2)20 (Photo from the Archive of Libyan Dept of Antiquities, Shahat).

The third stylistically strikingly similar to the first in script and decoration, and "probably coming from the mosque" is simply the date 351AH [973CE]. This was first stored in the Museum of Archaeology at Cyrene, and is now the Museum of Archaeology at Tolmeitha, where the present writer has transcribed and translated it. The inscription is on stone in a relief etching style, and was written with a foliated Kufic pen, as is clear because some letters end with bilobate leaves. There is a vertical break in the middle of it, with a loss of two letters, and also damage to the right hand side. The reading of the date as being in the mid-10th century (i.e. 4th century AH) is corroborated by Al-Ayachi 's discovery in 1662 in the mosque: "we found engraved in some of its stones the date of construction to be the year three hundred" (Al-Ayachi 1996, p.150, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 51) (See Fig. 88 A & B). The text of the inscription reads:

The Text and Translation:

[……one, fifty, and three hundred] ...

... [ةـــــــــئامثلاثو نيـــــــــسمـــــخو ىدـ[ـحا] ...[……]

Fig. 87A&B Foundation inscription found at Ajdabiyah, bearing the date 351AH /973CE (Photo from the Archive of Libyan Dept of Antiquities, Shahat).

A memorial tablet, commemorating a private individual of the Islamic faith (in this predominantly Coptic Christian city, one should remember), has been transcribed and translated by the present writer. The tablet here at Ajdabiyah falls into a recognisable pattern for private Islamic memorial inscriptions, which in general cover a number of topics. There are religious topics to do with the Islamic faith and with the Mohammedan message in different forms, sometimes with quotations from the Quran appropriate to the particular context. There are also details of a dead person or an event or an important achievement. The inscriptions are written on solid materials with a long survival life. They may be, in general, memorial plates, tombstones, coins, or various artistic or decorative shapes:

Gravestone dated 205 AH (820 CE):

A presentation of the inscription:

A gravestone dated (205AH/827CE) found at the Fatimid fortress in Ajdabiyah (Bubtana 2007, p. 33-35), and preserved in the Museum of Archaeology in Cyrene. It is written with a foliated Kufic pen, as is clear because some letters end with bilobate leaves. It is written in relief on a pure white marble slab of dimensions 43cm x 25cm x 7cm.

The gravestone originally had nine lines of lettering. The first line is now lost because of a break at the top. Eight lines remain. The break at the top has also damaged the first half of the second line, which perhaps gave the name of the dead person. The first line would certainly have been the Basmallah (see Fig. 89 A & B). The text reads:

The Text and Translation:

1. [Bism Allah the Most Gracious the Most Merciful]

2. …………. he witness

3. that there is no Allah but Allah and our [sic]

4. Mohammed [sic] proph [sic] of God and that the

5. the promise is right and the...

6. [عة] is coming without a doubt and

7. that Allah resurrects who are in the graves

8. He died May Allah be merciful to him on the first of

9. SHAB [sic] the age of five and one hundred.

1 ـ [بسم اللـه الرحمن الرحيم]

2 ـ .... هو يشهد

3 ـ أن لا اله إلا اللـه ونا [كذا]

4 ـ محمد [كذا] رسو [كذا] اللـه وإن ا

5 ـ الوعد حق وان الـسـا

6 ـ عة اتيه لا ريب فيها و

7 ـ ان اللـه يبعث من فى القبو

8 ـ ر توفى رحمه اللـه غرة

9 ـ شعبا [كذا] سنه خمس ومائة .

Most of the scholars who have worked on this gravestone have thought it the oldest found in Libya, to be dated to 105AH [727CE], as the last line of the text says. This seems to be incorrect. It is here suggested that the inscription must be dated to the 9th century (i.e. 3rd century AH), and that the writer made a mistake with the date. The

most important evidence for this is that the style of engraving we see here was not known at the beginning of the 8th century (i.e. 2nd century AH). The earliest examples of Kufic relief script on stone, found in Egypt, date to the beginning of the 9th century (203AH/825CE) (Basha 1977, p.113). It seems probable, therefore, that the word 'one' in the last line of the inscription should read 'two'.
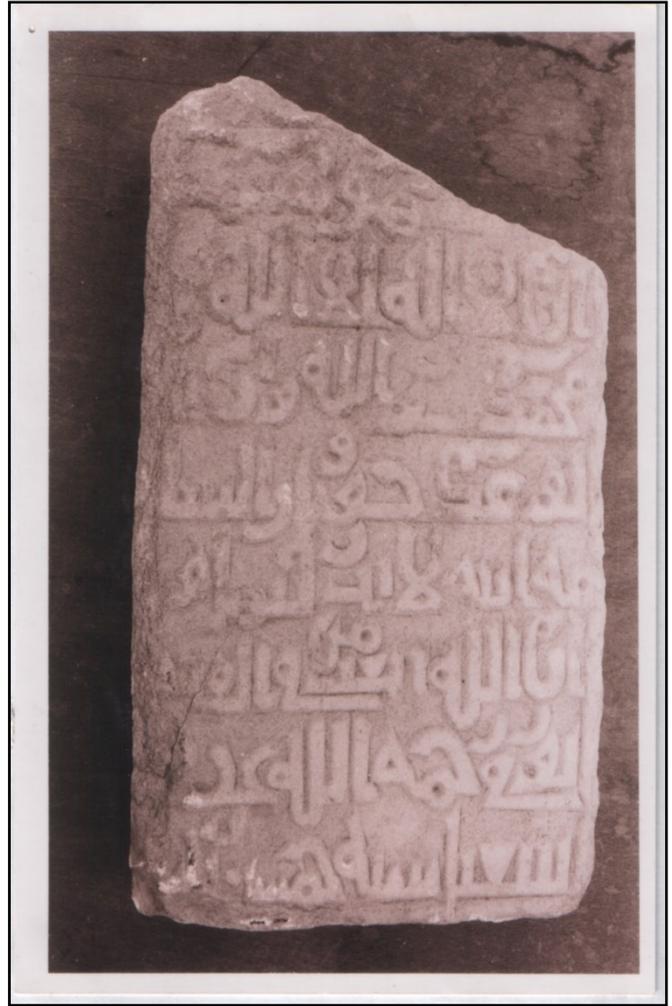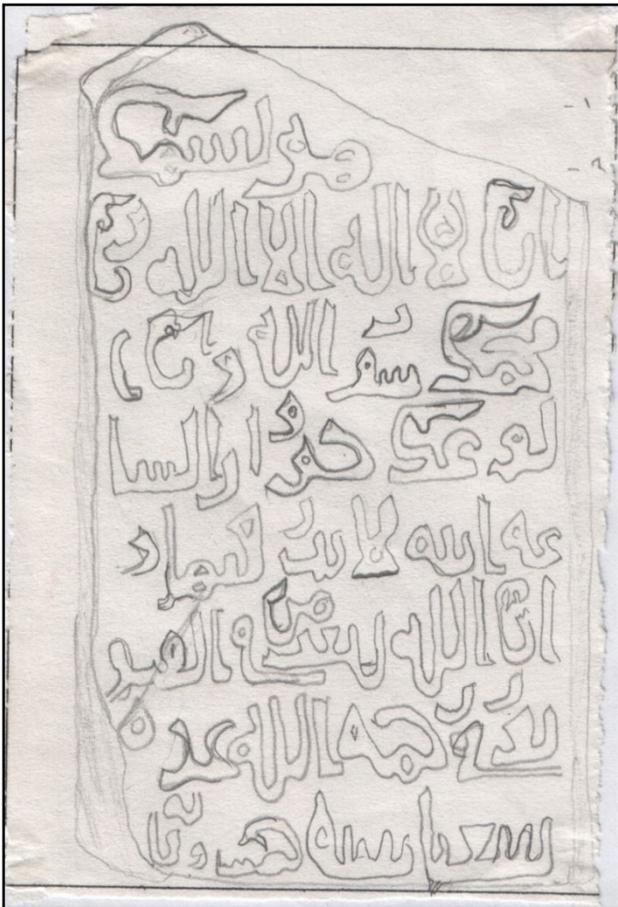
Fig. 88A&B Gravestone dated 205 AH (820 CE) (after Bubtana 2007, p.33-35).

5.5 Conclusions and recommendation

The importance of Ajdabiyah as an archaeological site has in part to do with the length of its history and the varying of its fortunes. It is well attested as the Roman town of Corniclanum, and it seems reasonable to suppose that the place was inhabited too before the Roman period. The presence of water springs and its situation close to routes for both land and sea travel along the coast and for caravans south into the interior make it highly likely that there is a pre-Roman history for the town (see Chapter 4, 4.1), even though no archaeological trace of it has yet come to light. After the Roman period, the town's Byzantine history is that of a modest but well established settlement, important both for the local population round it and for the travellers and merchants passing through.

The steady rise to greater importance in the Islamic period, so that Ajdabiyah could be called by Al-Bakri "a great city" (see Chapter 4, 4.1), had perhaps to do with the pattern of Islamic settlement and conquest in and beyond the region as a whole; but the more persuasive picture to emerge from this chapter is that the passage through the city at one moment or another of historically important events from outside, affected the life of the city only temporarily and superficially. The town was in a strategic economic location, and this made its fortune through time. The monumental aspect of the city particularly developed in the Fatimid period, which signals the moment of major development of the town.

Whether the construction of the fort and the mosque was made on the occasion of the transition of an important political figure, is not of great interest. What is important here to consider that the construction of large congregational mosques develops in the Fatimid period, and this is the moment of apex of importance for Cyrenaica. The proximity to Egypt and its significant economic role as trade post facing trans-Sahara

Africa and the Mediterranean at the same time, played a substantial role. The wealth which allowed the construction of a palatial fort and a large mosque, comparable to Qairawan, suggests that the settlement of Ajdabiyah became important. Being located along the major trading route to the trans-Sahara, close to the coast, and connecting Egypt with Tripolitania clearly its development was boosted by commercial activities and exchanges. These constructions indicate that this was an important Fatimid centre, which may have obscured the provincial capital of Barqa.

Chapter 6 : Medina Sultan (ie Surt/ Sirte)

6. Aim of this chapter

As discussed in Chapter 4, this is the second important centre which develops in the early Islamic period and it presents typical features of a medieval Islamic city. The historical events and the economic reconstructions which characterise this settlement have been discussed at length in chapter 4. In this section a detailed consideration of the archaeological evidence, to include material culture, will be considered.

6.1 Geography

The site of Medina Sultan lies on the coast of Libya approximately 55km east of modern Sirte ("Surt" in Arabic)[66], at the centre of the Libyan coastal region, midway between Benghazi and Tripoli. It has been identified with the Punic town of Charax, then the Roman town of Iscina, in which there was a significant Jewish colony (Goodchild 1964, pp.99-100; Fehérvári 2002, p.13; and see also Hardy-Guilbert 2010, p.76; see also Kennedy 2010, p.45, and Chapter 4, 4.2 of this chapter on the significance of the Arabic term 'medina'), and the mediaeval Islamic town of Sort or Surt. The Islamic town, on a slightly removed site, with the Roman site to the west and close to the sea, seems to have flourished as a distinct urban centre until the middle of the 11th century: "five kilometres farther to the east [of the Islamic town] is the small oasis of Sultan, where there are some 12 wells of excellent water, and a small palm-grove immediately behind the coastal dunes. Five kilometres to the south of Sultan

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[66] "Modern commentators on the geography of the Syrtic region have sometimes confused medieval *Sort* [Surt] with modern *Sirte* ("Sert" in Arabic); and it may therefore be useful to explain how the latter name came into being. After the decline and abandonment of *Sort*, its name came to be applied loosely to the whole region (just as the name "Barqa" has been transferred from a single city to a whole region). Until the Turkish re-occupation of Libya in 1835, following the fall of the Karamanli dynasty, the Syrtic region had no recognised administrative centre, and was infested by bandits. To remedy this, the Turks erected a fortress at Marsa Zaafran (modern Sirte) completing it in 1842, and nominated a "Bey of Sert" to represent the government. The fortress, at first called "Qasr Zaafran," later came to be more generally known as "Qasr Sert" - and thus a regional name came to be re-localized, although not in the place of its origin. The Turkish fortress was repaired by the Italians in 1912, and around it has grown up the modern township of Sirte" (Goodchild 1964, p.102).

oasis, on a low hill, is the well named Bir esh-Shakshakia, near which are some ancient ruins isolated from the main group at Medina Sultan itself (Goodchild 1964, p.99)".

The geographical position of Medina Sultan made of it a place of great strategic importance at certain moments in the Early Islamic period. Medina Sultan lay mid-way between fairly well inhabited zones to its west and east, and in semi-desert country particularly difficult to cross. Whoever held Medina Sultan controlled the most difficult part of the route from North Africa to Egypt (See Chapter 4, 4.2), a route of course often travelled by unimportant people (otherwise it would not have been a route) without overwhelming difficulty, but offering formidable problems to people who for one reason or another, at this moment or that, insisted on travelling it with an army. The basic question we must ask ourselves in this chapter is whether Mouton and Racinet (Mouton et Racinet 2011) are right to imply, as they do in this following passage, that the 'shifting and unstable political history' which at times swirled round the town was an essential part of it; or whether the picture we can construct for ourselves of the life of the town from its archaeology gives a different impression: "Surt [ie Medina Sultan] and its region seem at one and the same time the frontier between the Islamic East and West, a transitional zone, and also (and this is not to contradict what has just been said) a bridge between these two regions. This strategic position gave birth to a shifting and unstable political history: the town was at all times at issue in the political relationship between Egypt and Africa (Mouton et Racinet 2011, p.34, translated from the French)".[67] It was in fact in the first Fatimid century, the 10th century, when circumstances allowed the town to function as a bridge, a staging point, on the route between east and west, and also as a terminus for the trans-Saharian caravans

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[67] "Surt et sa région apparaissent à la fois comme une frontière entre l'Orient et l'Occident musulman, une zone de transition, et ausii, cela n'est pas contradictoire, comme un pont entre ces deux régions. Cette position stratégique s'est traduite par une histoire mouvementée: la ville fut un enjeu permanent entre l'Égypte et l'Ifrîqiyya."

coming from the south, that it reached its zenith of prosperity. This is when its port also would have been in most constant use, linking the whole region into the network of commercial relations which spread out over the Islamic western Mediterranean and the ports of Sicily (Mouton et Racinet 2011, p.35; Ibn Hawqual 1978) (see Fig 90 and chapter 4).
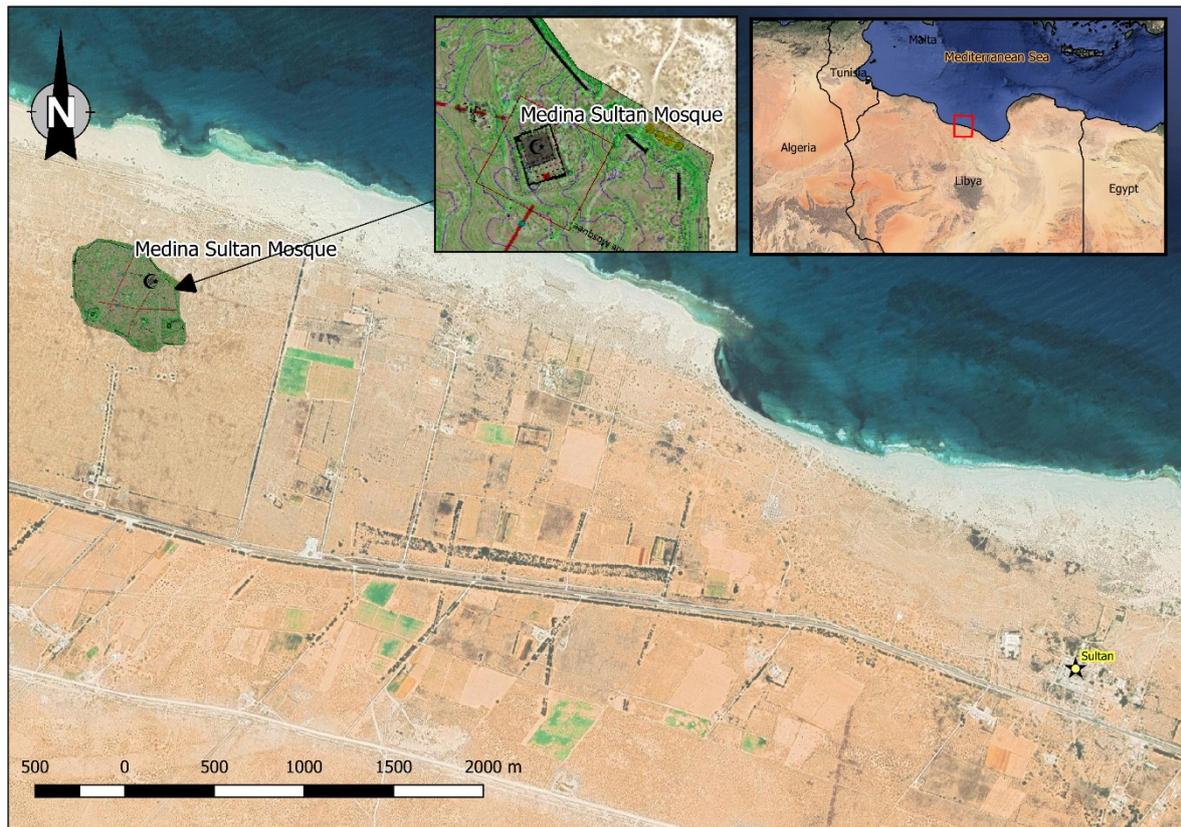
Fig. 89 Aerial view of the locations of Medina Sultan site (by Author elaborated from Google Earth).

6.2 Medina Sultan in the books of travellers and geographers

Probably the oldest mention of the city was by Al-Yaqoubi who described the city at the end of the 9th century (278AH/900CE). He says that: "the neighbouring town of Ajdabiyah was the western boundary of the Lawata Berbers (a branch of the Butr confederation to which the Zanata also belonged) ...One marhala stage) westwards was the Mazata territory…. Going four marhalas (stages) further west was the town of Surt which was dominated by the Mindasah: Mahanha and Kantas Berbers.Two more

marhalas (stages) to the west of Surt [ie Medina Sultan] was the boundary of the Barqa province at the town of Tawarga. After which began the territory of the Hawwara Berbers reaching as far as Tripoli…. the Mazata Berbers were all Ibadi (Al-Yaqoubi 1892, pp.344-45, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 53)".

Al-Yaqoubi did not mention any mosque, forts or markets, as there were at Ajdabiyah. This confirms that the city of Surt did not have any commercial importance in the 9th century (by which we mean no importance beyond the local). He gives us, however, a good description of the Berber presence and the influence of the Ibadi tribe in the town. These were the same Ibadis communities who populated these cities and were also controlling the trans-Saharan trade (See Chapter 4).

Ibn Khurrdadhbih[68] and later al-Muqaddasi[69] both mention Surt and Ajdabiyah on the Barqa-Tripoli route but give no details (Ibn Khurdadhbih 1889, p.86; and al-Muqaddasi 1906, p.92; Khordadheh 1889, pp.85-86). In the 10th century the geographer, Ibn Hawqal, who lived in the early Fatimid period and died after 378AH/1000CE, and who started his travels as early as 331AH/953CE, seems to have passed by Surt on the way to the Fatimid capital Al-Mahdiyya in 336AH/958CE. Ibn Hawqal described the city thus: "the city of Surt lies a bow-shot away from the sea, built on hard sandy ground, a strong walled city of mud and brick. It is inhabited by Berber tribes who own farms there. They have cisterns to store rainwater. The town has date palms from which fresh dates are harvested, but the ripe and dry dates are only sufficient for its own use. It has grapes and other fruit, and the prices of these are reasonable. The town is noted for its goats whose meat is more tender than that of sheep. The Berber tribes in the surrounding area are more numerous than at other places. They are often

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[68] d.300AH/922CE.
[69] 375 AH/997CE.

at war with each other, but during the rainy season, they visit Surt in search of pasture. Visiting ships bring merchandise, and the city exports the famous Surti alum [*shabb*], wool and mutton. The wealth of Surt, in terms of its produce, its provision for pasture for camels and goats and its total revenue is greater than the wealth of Ajdabiyah. The city's governor, an appointee of the Sultan in Ifriqiya [he means the Fatimid caliph] supervises its imports and exports, taxes and custom-duties, services and contributions and maintains registers and records of all monies and goods. This is to safeguard against any tax-evasion on dues owed to Ifriqiya (Ibn Hawqal 1892, pp.70-71, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 54)".

Ibn Hawqal gives us good information about the thriving agricultural and trading community, well organised within, and controlled by the Fatimid sovereign power. Surt was larger and more prosperous than the probably older town of Ajdabiyah. Ibn Hawqal mentions the walls of the city but he does not mention forts or a mosque. Again, we can see that a thriving and strong city is possible without very much importance beyond the local. It is 'a strong walled city', the Berber element in its population probably the dominant one. The date palms are worth mentioning, but they produce fruit sufficient only for the use of the local inhabitants. There are goods coming in and going out, but the trade is probably again chiefly for its local usefulness. A significant part of its wealth is in the form of good pasture, which attracts people from the surrounding area in the rainy season.

The most usual account of the destruction of Surt has been that it was destroyed by the tribe of Banu Hilal and Banu Sulaym in the mid-11th century. This cannot be true because the historians and travellers who lived through the period of these tribal migrations say nothing about the destruction of Surt. Al-Bakri, who visited the city in the 11th century, described what he saw: "It is a large city situated beside the sea and

enclosed by a wall of bricks. It has a mosque, a bath and bazaars. It has three gates:

Qibli (south-east), *Jawfi* (landwards) and a small one facing the sea (north). This city

has no suburbs around it but possesses date-palms, gardens, sweet-water springs

and many cisterns. Its animals are goats and their meat is juicy (*adhbah*) and tender

tayyiba), the like of which is not found in Egypt. (Al-Bakri 1857, pp.6-7, author's

translation; see Arabic Appendix, passage 55)". [70]

Al-Bakri describes a big city with palm trees, orchards and markets outside the walls;

but at the same time he does not refer to the existence of the suburbs around the city,

so perhaps there was a lack of density of population at the time of Al-Bakri's visit. He

mentions a mosque, so we are to suppose that a mosque of some noteworthy

presence had been built by this time. We remember that, a century before, there is the

description of surrounding people coming in for pasture in the rainy season. It is a

large and attractive city which spreads beyond its walls, though the spread seems an

agricultural rather than a surburban feature. The inhabitants, according to al-Bakri,

were avaritious and with a reputation for sharp practice, so much so that they were

nicknamed "Abid-Qirilla" (slaves of the Kirilla, a voracious Asiatic eagle-like bird which

preys on fish), "the worst people on the earth in their transactions and the ugliest in

their actions" (Fehérvári 2002, p.21). They also spoke a dialect which nobody else

could understand: "their talk is a babble, not (entirely) Arabic or Persian; Berber or

Coptic." Abbas Hamdani points out the presence of the copts is an important element

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[70] Quoted by Abbas Hamdani (in Fehérvári 2002, p.18) who also adds a note: Goodchild...has translated the word *jawf* as "north"; and Mohammad Mostafa...has misread it as *bahri*, "facing the sea", which would also indicate north. The gate referred to is actually in the west, hence *jawfi*, i.e. "towards the land". In both Goodchild's and Mohammad Mostafa's rendering, we get two gates in the north and facing the sea but none in the west. The correct word *jawfi* in al-Bakri is confirmed by the excavations, as there is a gate in the west, towards the land, i.e. *jawf*. His excavations also confirm that there is only one gate to the north not two. Mohammad Mostafa describes the great trouble he encountered searching for the second "gate facing the sea" which turned out to be facing west! Mohammad Mostafa mentions the third gate of al-Bakri correctly as *qibli* (i.e. facing Mecca) which is mentioned by Goodchild only as the "south gate". The former stated that he had seen traces of this *qibli* gate on the eastern wing of the city wall. However, in the last season of excavation in 1981, Dr Fehérvári discovered this gate in the south-east outside the third fort in the same direction.

and it should be noted also in the context of the commercial prosperity of the minorities under the Fatimid rule (Fehérvári 2002, p.20;).

The inhabitants of the city seem in this particular account to be very much a tightly enclosed local society, their language a single dialect, almost unintelligible to outsiders, in which are fused together linguistic elements which could be found separately elsewhere. It sounds as though one might describe Medina Sultan (Surt) at this point as being a melting pot rather than a patchwork of people. In a city which drew its importance from the passage of important people, from trade, and political and military passage through it, one would expect a patchwork of languages and not a single muddy dialect, and one might expect a slightly more open attitude to those who came than these Abid-Qirilla exhibit. One could be strong, prosperous, flourishing, without ceasing to be intensely local, inward-turning. This is not a Cyrenaica as the great passageway between more important places; but rather as tight, independent, minding its own business, quietly flourishing.

A century later, Al-Idrisi, in *Nuzhat al-mushtaq fi'khtiraq al-afaq* (The book of pleasant journeys into faraway lands), most often known as the *Tabula Rogeriana*, describes a town very much poorer, a shadow of its former self: "Here are the cities of Surt and Ajdabiyah, once well-known but in our times in a state of great weakness and with cultivation neglected. Only the memories of their traces and repute have remained. Ships come to them with goods which are profitable in proportion to their capacity. As far as Ajdabiyah, nothing remains now except two forts in the desert and by the sea, four miles away. There are no trees around it. Its people are dominated by Jews and Muslim merchants. And many people from the Berber quarters visit it (Al-Idrisi1866, p.90, author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 56)".

By the first half of the 13th century, according to Ali ibn Said (685 AH/1285 CE), there was even less to be seen: "Surt is among the old military bases (*qawa' id*) reported in books. The Arab bedouin had destroyed it. They now live in the forts that have survived" (Ibn Said1840 , p.62 , author's translation; Arabic Appendix, passage 57). Abbas Hamdani completes the picture: "Between the thirteenth and the nineteenth centuries, oblivion descended upon the Surt region. Abu Al-Fida in the early 14th century merely quoted from Ali ibn Said and added no further information. Unfortunately, the geography of the Maghrib written by Ibn Khaldun in 1401 for Timur has not survived and so we miss the keen observation of that great scholar. In the sixteenth century, Libya became Ottoman territory and remained so until conquered by Italy in 1911. An Ottoman writer of the 19th century, Ahmad al-Naib al-Ansari, described Surt as part of the great Surt region, halfway between Misurata and Benghazi. He said that the name Surt applied also to the big stretch of coast, the eastern part of it being the *Jawn al-Kibrit* (i.e. the Gulf of Sulphur) ...What is noteworthy is that the name of the city and knowledge about it survived until the time when the first western explorers, the Beechey brothers, visited it in 1821 (Fehérvári 2002, p.23)". What then happened to the city? We know from Ibn Hawqal in the 10th century that the Berber tribes in the local neighbourhood were often at war with each other; and it was perhaps this local instability, as it were for a long period native to the city itself, which finally brought about its decline. The city, then, was not attacked from the outside but was rather succumbing to its own internal tensions, and unable or willing to draw upon help from outside.

The Beechey brothers saw what actually was Medina Sultan itself, which they thought had been clearly "an important military position" and where there were "the remains of several strongly-built fortresses." Then, "in the neighbourhood of the military

position...the remains of the town...called Medina," no doubt (inaccurately) indicated by their guides. This second site was clearly the place now called Bir esh-Shakshakia, where according to the Beechey account "there are a number of wells and tanks in very good preservation; but the buildings above ground...in so mutilated and ruinous a state, as to render any satisfactory plan of them impossible, without a great deal of previous excavation" (Beechey 1828, pp.169-170). Heinrich Barth visited Medina Sultan in 1846, and observed that the two forts were connected by a rampart (Barth 1849, pp.334-335). He was also the first traveller to conclude, after a long discussion of the problem, that the site had been successively home to Charax, Iscina and Sort (Barth 1849, pp.364-377).

Abbas Hamdani summarises four distinct periods for mediaeval Surt as described in the works of the Arab geographers and travellers. A Berber town was established about the time of the transition from the Umayyad to the Abbas dynasty as a Kharijite enclave, independent of the central Caliphate of Baghdad. This was in the vicinity of the ruins of the Roman Iscina which may have perished during one of the Berber revolts against Byzantine authority even before the rise of Islam. This Berber enclave was then taken over and built upon by the early Fatimids until they shifted their headquarters to Egypt. During this period, it existed as a trading and military post. Decline was subsequently caused by three factors: a) it was no longer needed as a military base by the Fatimids; b) it became insecure and unstable because of Fatimid-Zirid conflict; and c) it suffered heavily during the Hilalian invasion. It finally withered away from the twelfth to the early nineteenth century. It is at this time that western exploration and modern archaeology revived the knowledge of it (Fehérvári 2002, p.13).

Having identified the major historical text referring to Medina Sultan (Surt), I am now going to consider the archaeological evidence.

6.3 Development of archaeological investigation

With the visit of Captain Luigi Cerrata in 1931, we leave behind travellers and come to the very beginning of archaeological study. There is a sketch plan of Medina Sultan and some photographs in the volume on Sirtis he published in 1933; but he supposed a little too easily that the evident remains on the site were all of Roman provenance (Cerrata 1933, pp.209-212). Goodchild in 1950 made a "compass-survey of the principal part of the site", and the aerial photographs he had taken show clearly that the mediaeval city stood within a much larger area needing archaeological investigation, which probably formed part of Iscina (Goodchild 1964, p.100).

M. Mostafa and A. Abdussaid began the first actual excavations, of the town wall of Medina Sultan and its mosque, in 1963-1967 (Mostafa 1967, pp.145-54; Abdussaid 1966-67, pp.155-60; Fehérvári 2002, p.3); and a four-year excavation followed this by G. Fehervari from 1977 to 1981 (King 1989, p.200; Fehervari 2002, pp.25-68). The town wall seemed to be an irregular oval shape, enclosing an area of approximately 184,000 m^2. It was constructed of small stones, clad with rectangular slabs, and strengthened with buttresses at irregular intervals (Fehérvári 2002, p.11). Mostafa found a length of wall on the north side of the enclosure, and two gates, one facing to the west and a smaller one to the north. A gate near the south-east corner of the wall was found later, in 1980-1981, and seems at some point to have been walled up (Fehérvári 2002, p.114; see also 6.2). What appeared to have been two forts, to the south-east and the south-west of the enclosure, were assumed to have been built by the Caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah Fatimid in the 10th century, as part of the preparation

for his attack on Egypt. A central mound was investigated by Fehervari who demonstrated that it was not a large building, as Goodchild had speculated, but the shops and workshops area of the town, with the remains of bread ovens, an iron furnace, and possibly glass manufacture (Fehervari 2002, pp.64, 95, 97, 114). The surprising finding of an egg-shaped piece of green nephrite jade, which might have been used by paper-makers or a scribe to smooth writing surfaces, suggests also less ordinary pursuits (Fehérvári 2002, p.99) (see Fig 91).
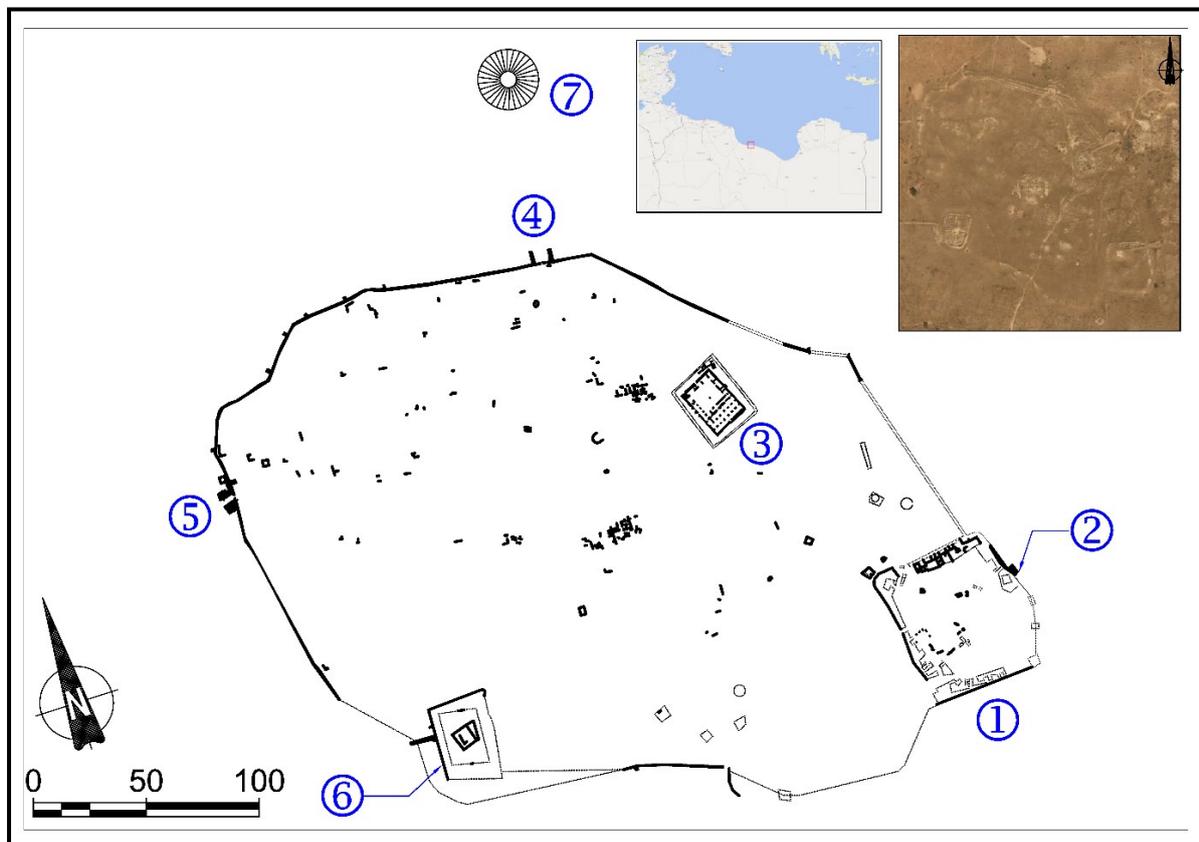
Fig. 90 Plan of the town of Medina Sultan (Surt) Drawing by Gant 2012 redrawing by Enas Bubtana.

The Fatimid mosque in the north-east corner of the town (see Fig 91, No 3) was first excavated in 1963-1964 by Abdussaid, and the ground plan could easily be made out. The building as a whole was on a roughly north-south alignment, with five entrances to the prayer-hall on the south side.

The French investigation of the whole site of the town, begun in 2007 (Mouton et Racinet 2011), had as its aim to establish an overall view of Medina Sultan (Surt) which would allow more sensitive individual excavation of what remained. The detailed work so far suggests that the densely inhabited part of the city was its northern half, with a clearly hierarchised geometrical pattern of streets and alleys aligned on north-east to south-west axes extending from the main gates. The temptation is to suppose that this geometrical pattern was part of the underlying Greek structure of the city, what has been spoken of as the 'Greek presence' in the discussion of Kennedy's hybrid city argument in (See Chapter 4, 4.2, p.198).

The shape of the densely inhabited zone seems to have been influenced by the run of the outside wall of the city, but (perhaps significantly in view of what has been said about the building work done in Medina Sultan for reasons external to the city's own internal needs) not to have been greatly affected by the mosque and the forts. The south-west quarter of the city seems almost free of any construction work, and the south-eastern quarter to have been given over to wells and cisterns, though some of these seem to date from after the abandonment of the city as a settled inhabited place (Mouton et Racinet 2011, p.38).

6.4 Archaeological evidence

The whole line of the wall enclosing the medieval town has now been identified, the

enclosure containing (see Fig 92), it is now clear; the remains of two substantial
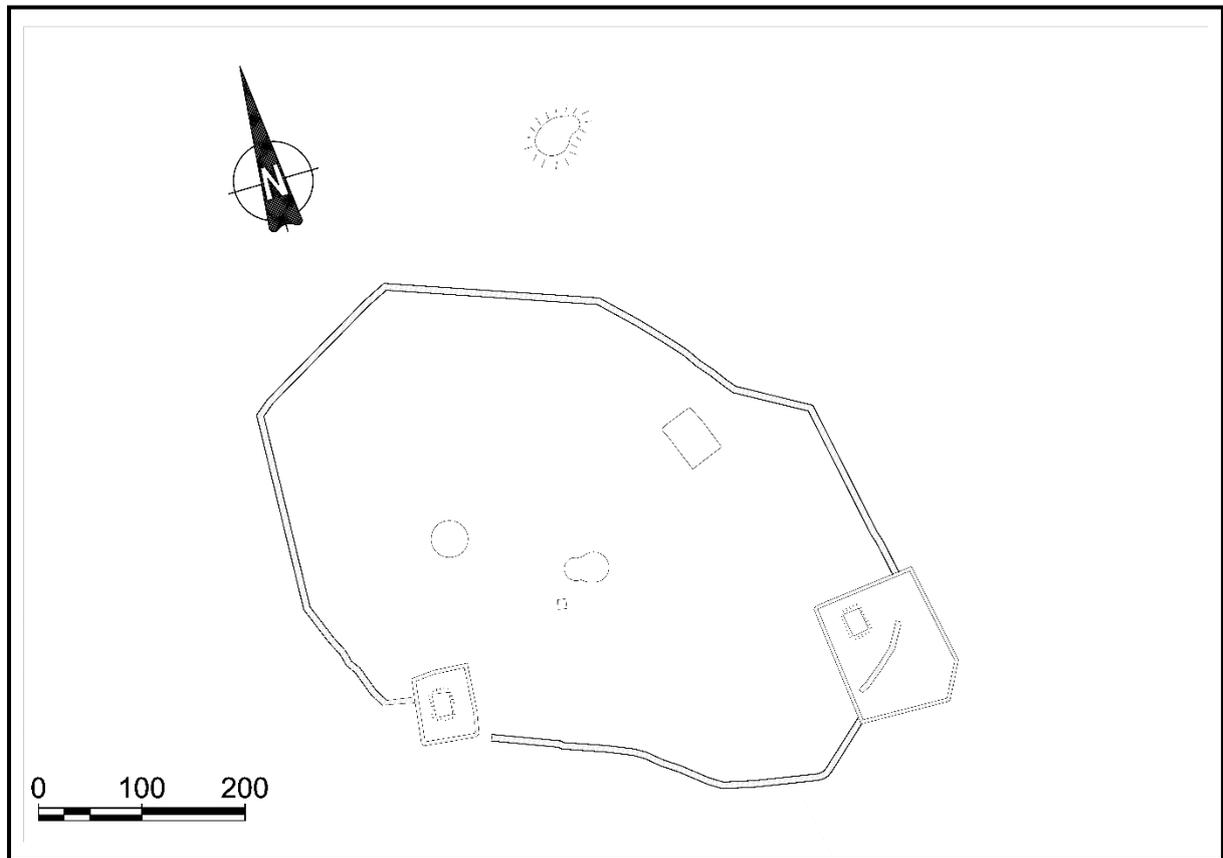
Fig. 91 Plan of Medina Sultan (Surt) Drawing by Goodchild 1964: redrawing by Enas Bubtana.

forts, which postdate the wall and are backed up against it as no private dwelling

places do (Gnat 2012, p.201), at the south-west and south-east (see Fig. 91, No 6&1)

extremities of its circuit, connected as Barth first noticed (Barth 1849, pp.334-335) "by

a rampart forming the southern defences of the city" (Goodchild 1964, p.104). A fort

also stands to the north of the town, outside the wall enclosure, close to the north gate

(see Fig. 91, No 7&4). The other two city gates have now also been found; and the

mosque has been well explored, though problems still remain (See Fig. 91, No 3). The

mound to the south-west of the mosque is now revealed as a 'shops and workshops'

centre for the city, this and not the forts or the mosque being, one might well suppose,

the heart of the city's activity. A cemetery lies outside the line of the wall at the southern extremity of its circuit. The town undoubtedly also had a port right on the coast, "an arrow-shot from the city,"[71] as Ibn Hawqal (See 6.2) describes the proximity of the sea to the city. This must be the rocky outcrop directly to the north (Mouton et Racinet 2011, p.36; Fehérvári 2002, p.14). The town which survives is 600m from the sea and, "largely constructed from mud bricks, has literally melted down into itself" (Mouton et Racinet 2011, p.38, translated from the French)[72], and is scarcely distinguishable from the semi-desert which surrounds it. What remains of the town, "those features which define the urban space" [73] (Gnat 2012, p.199), are the vestiges of the town wall and the forts, together with the mosque; and (in the opinion of the most recent investigators of the site) it is these remains which "are absolutely essential for an understanding not only of the *urban organisation* [of Surt] but also of the history of the town and the functions it was called upon to perform."[74]

Although it may be that in classical pre-Islamic times, the principal fortifications of a town and its evidently major buildings established and defined its reality, there is abundant evidence, for instance, that fortification was not, for Islamic town-dwellers, a matter of much local concern. Hugh Kennedy writes here of the great city of Fustat: "It was founded in the immediate aftermath of the surrender of the Byzantine forces in Alexandria on the site of the camp where the Arab forces had stayed when they were besieging the great Roman fort known as Babylon. Although Fustat was founded outside the walls of the great Roman fortress, the Muslims made no use of the Roman castle which seems to have been left in the hands of its Coptic inhabitants. It might be

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[71] 'à une portée de flèche.'

[72] 'largement construite en briques crues, a littéralement fondu sur elle-même.'

[73] 'ces éléments structurants de l'espace urbain'

[74] 'absolument essentiels pour comprendre non seulement l'organisation urbaine, mais aussi l'histoire de la ville et les fonctions qui lui étaient attachées'

thought that the great walls of the fort would have been perfect for protecting the Amir of the newly conquered province and the emerging Islamic government but the Muslim settlement developed outside its defences as a *completely unfortified urban conglomerate*. The lack of fortification was a general feature of early Islamic urbanism. Neither Kufa nor Basra were fortified in the first century of their existence and in Baghdad only the caliph's round city was fortified, the rest of the town being left open. Individual palaces at Samarra were enclosed by walls but the city as a whole had none. Perhaps the most striking example of the lack of interest in fortification can be seen in the city of Merv the most important early Muslim settlement in Khurasan. In Merv there was a citadel and a large fortified city surrounded by superb walls. The Arab settlers, however, chose not to live in this defended area but built a new quarter outside the walls to the West. This new quarter was both the economic and political heart of the city but it remained unwalled until the end of the eleventh century. Meanwhile the old walled city was largely deserted. The absence of walls seems to have reflected a preference among the military of the early Islamic world for fighting in open country: battles in the field rather than sieges determined the outcome of wars" (Kennedy 2010, p.51).

Because it has not been re-occupied since the time of its abandonment, Medina as Sultan offers the possibility of 'uninterrupted' archaeological investigation, with no later life lived on it, of a site dating from the first centuries of the Islamic occupation of Cyrenaica, and in the modified sense of 'newly founded' I have suggested for it earlier in this chapter, it is a newly founded Islamic city, as recorded in the case of Ajdabiyiah. As in many cases, including for instance the case of Barqa, the presence of mud brick buildings is rather common in this period, especially for private architecture, while the public architecture as the fort and the large mosque in Ajdabiyiah is built in stone.

6.4.1 Forts

Even though al-Maqrizi[75] (Maqriziin 1967) dates the building of the forts at Surt to 355AH/977CE (Fehervari 2002, p.15), it seems likely that some kind of fortified dwellings would have been raised on the site by the mid-7th century (See Chapter 4, 4.2); and it is probable that the forts that survive now at Medina Sultan were constructed about the year 590AH/1212CE. The forts are alone in being backed up against the pre-existing town wall, and are largely constructed of stone, in marked contrast with the rest of the urban environment of Medina Sultan (Gnat 2012, p.209). Urban life and fortification, then, seem to be *distinct and separate* features of Surt, both in their placing and their construction: "the economic decline and progressive abandonment of settled life did not bring as its consequence the disappearance of Medina Sultan, as could previously have been thought. The major result of the first four seasons of excavation [by the French team of archaeologists] has been to demonstrate that the town was the scene of renewed activity about the year 1200, an activity related to the construction of *qasr* or forts. The foundation inscription of one of these forts was found during the 2010 season. This activity corresponds without doubt to the reinforcement of the role of Medina Sultan as a military base, or *qa'ida*, and perhaps even to the emergence of the town as a local political centre at the heart of the desert space that the two great empires to the east and the west, the Ayyoubides and the Almohades, found it difficult to control. Paradoxically, the erection of new forts does not seem to have been accompanied by any urban and commercial renewal. The travellers who visited the town at this period note not only the construction of forts but also the urban and suburban abandonment (Mouton et Racinet 2011, p.39; see also Gnat 2010, p.210 on the dating of the impressive tower of one of the forts to about the

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[75] d845AH/1441CE.

beginning of the 13th century,' as a period when the city was in total decline Gnat 2012, pp.210, 215, 218).[76]
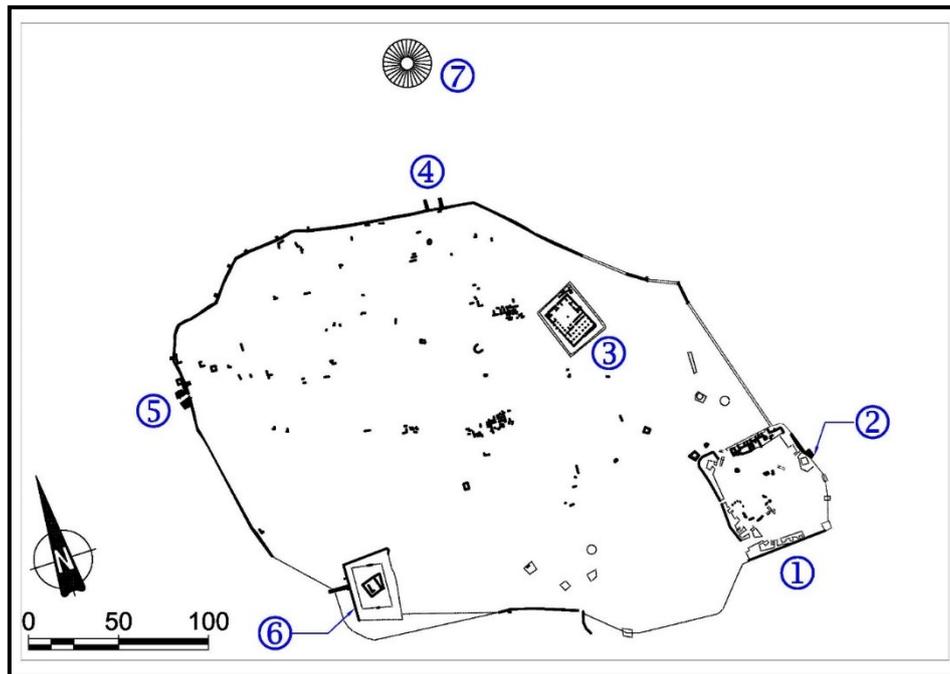
Fig. 92 Plan of the town of Medina Sultan (Surt), Gnat 2010. Redrawn by Enas Bubtana.

At least one of these forts, that to the south-east, seems to have served not only as the governor's residence but also as barracks for the soldiers, as evidenced by small chambers or casemates found constructed against the north wall (see Fig. 93, No 1).

What I have written so far in this section might be called the standard approach. It is an approach which faces many difficulties. It is interesting, instead, to consider further the building of forts as more or less *irrelevant* to the history of the city: a) "the erection of new forts does not seem to have been accompanied by any urban and commercial renewal"; b) "the town was the scene of renewed activity about the year 1200, an

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[76] Ce déclin économique et cet abandon progressif de l'habitat n'entraînèrent pas la disparition de la localité comme on avait pu le croire jusque-là. Le résultat majeur des quatre premières campagnes conduites a été de montrer que la ville connaît une activité nouvelle aux alentours de 1200, liée à la construction de *qasr* ou forts; l'inscription de fondation de l'un d'entre eux a été retrouvé durant la campagne 2010. Cela correspond sans doute au renforcement du rôle de Medina Sultan comme base militaire, ou *qa'ida*, et peut-être même à l'émergence de la cité comme centre politique local au sein d'un espace désertique que les deux grands empires de l'est et de l'ouest, les Ayyoubides et les Almohades, avaient du mal à contrôler. Paradoxalement, l'érection de nouveaux forts ne semble pas s'accompagner d'un renouveau urbain et commercial. Les voyageurs qui traversent alors la ville constatent tout en signalant ces constructions le phénomène de déprise urbaine et l'abandon des plantations périurbaines.

activity related to the construction of *qasr* or forts"; c) "this activity corresponds without doubt to the reinforcement of the role of Medina Sultan as a military base, or *qa'ida*, and perhaps even to the emergence of the town as a local political centre at the heart of the desert space that the two great empires to the east and the west, the Ayyoubides and the Almohades, found it difficult to control": there is something radically incoherent and contradictory about these speculations. I would like to suggest that either there was a thriving local population still in the town by this period, or there was not; and any *plan* to make of Medina Sultan a "local political centre", on the part of "the two great empires" a long way away would have been at best idealistic on the part of long-distance planners, and nothing to do with the *actuality* of the city.

6.4.2 The mosque

The Fatimid mosque in the north-east corner of the town was first excavated in 1963-1964 by Abdussaid, and the ground plan could easily be made out (see Fig. 94 A).
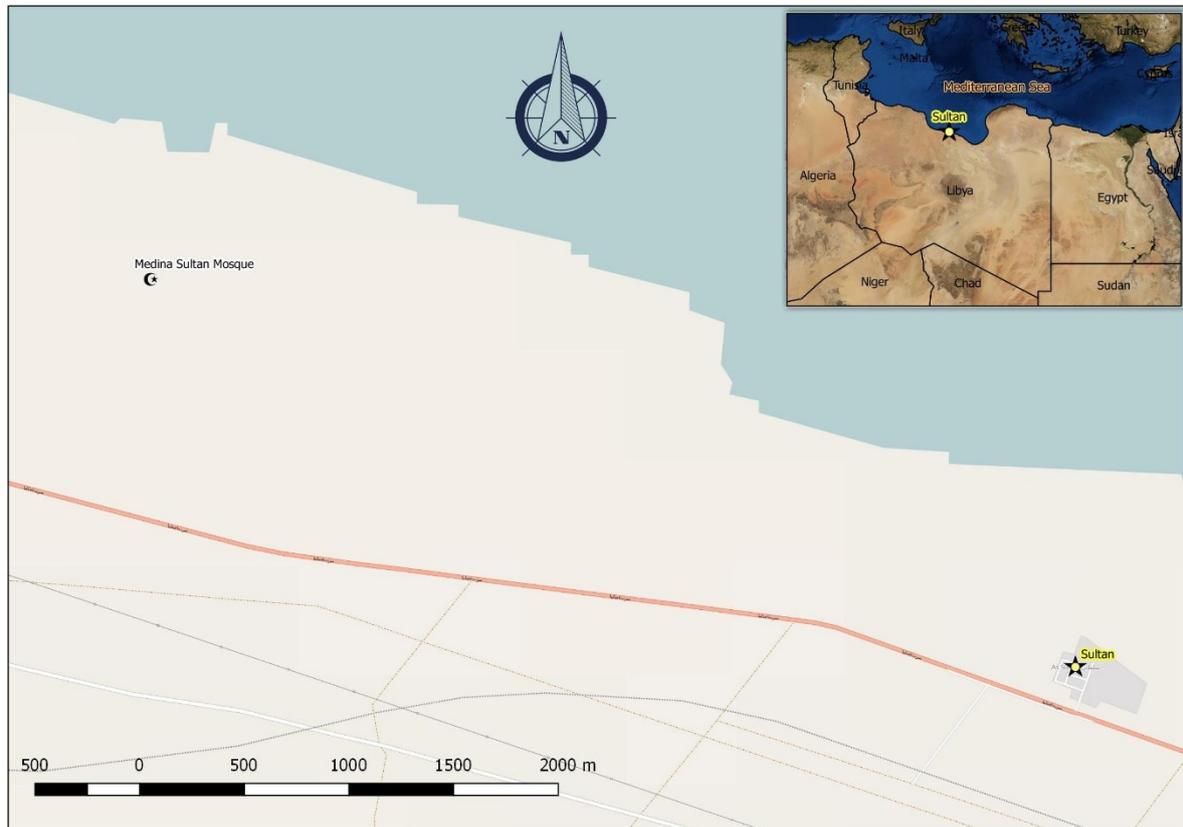
Fig. 93A The Location of Medina Sultan (ie Surt/Sirte) Mosque (by Author elaborated from Google Earth).

The building as a whole was on a roughly north-south alignment, with five entrances to the prayer-hall on the southern side. The main entrance was to the west, giving on to a courtyard enclosed by porticoes and with a water cistern in the centre. Puzzlingly, the orientation of the mihrab was due south instead of the correct south-east. Fehervari interestingly suggests that this might be an argument for an early dating of the first mosque on the site (See Chapter 4, 4.2): if the mihrab was orientated in error, as it seems it must have been, the orientation could not have been corrected later because in Islamic canon law a mihrab in which an ashab, a 'companion to the prophet' had prayed could not be touched; and if the mosque was indeed first built by and

prayed in by Amr Ibn Al-As, who was an ashab, in the 7th century, then this would explain why the error of orientation was ever after left untouched (Fehervari 2002, p.34). There are, however, other possibilities. The variation of possible orientation for the qibla, the sacred direction, could legitimately be very great in the medieval period, and might well depend upon what method was used for ascertaining it. Sophisticated mathematical methods might be used, though even these could without scandal produce different results; or alternatively, methods derived from 'folk-astronomy' (these particularly favoured by medieval Islamic canon lawyers) might give orientations very widely differing from the results of modern calculations. As King remarks, it is simply not sufficient for a modern investigator to stand in front of the mihrab with a magnetic compass, and to read off a comment on whether the orientation towards the sacred Kaaba in Mecca is accurate or not. In addition, it was known from the earliest times that the Prophet, praying at a place north of Mecca, prayed facing south; and this could be a factor of legitimate consequence in the minds of medieval builders (King, D. 1995) (see Fig. 94 B&C). Let us for a moment consider the possibility that an early mosque on the site of the later more monumental building,

itself erected later to celebrate the passage through the town of someone important from outside, was built with its mihrab 'wrongly' orientated.[77]
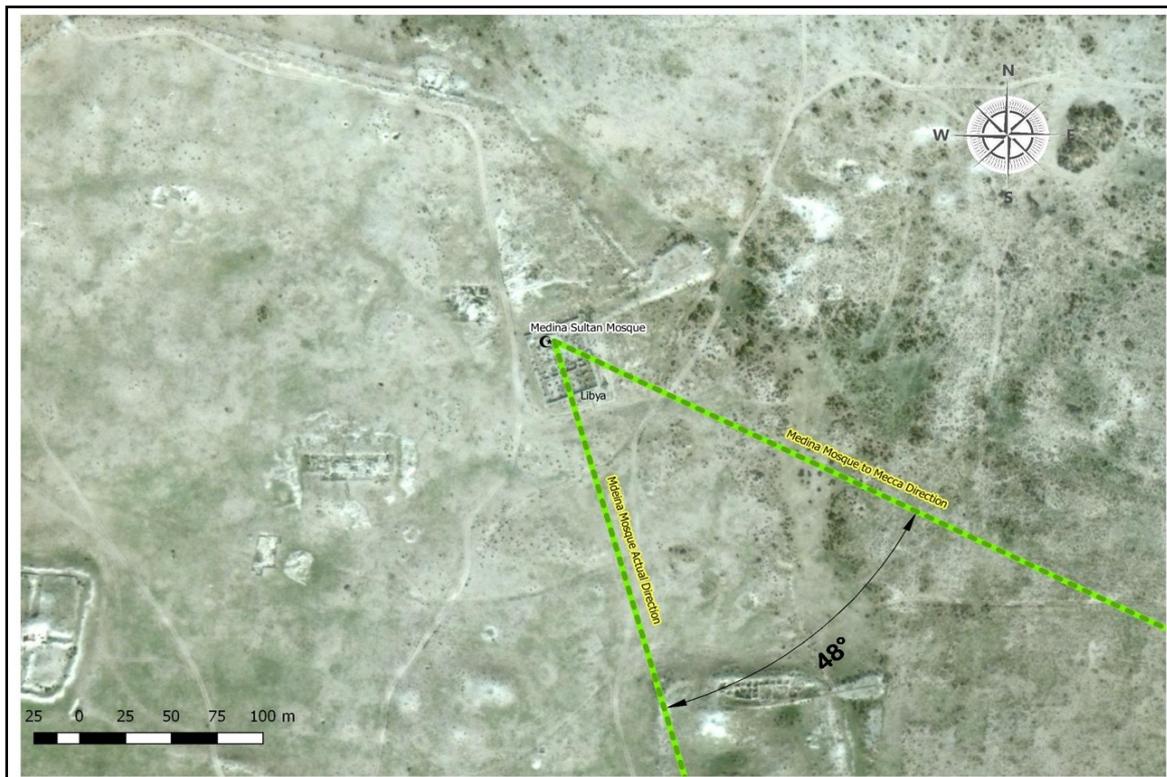
Fig. 94B&C The Deviation of the Qibla Direction in Medina Sultan's Mosque (by Author elaborated from Google Earth).

The mosque in its surviving form strongly resembles in its ground plan the so-called 'early courtyard mosques' excavated at Zuwīla and Ajdabiyah and is typical of Fatimid mosques in Ifriqiya (Fehervari 2002, p.113). There are also closer links between the mosque at Medina Sultan/Surt and the mosque at Ajdabiyah, as Bongianino notes: "the palmette framing the Ajdabiyah lion [in the Ajdabiyah qasr] is identical to the moulded stuccowork from the Fatimid mosque of Surt, clumsily reused in its mihrab after the building had fallen into ruin (Bongianino 2015, p.178, Fig. 8 ; see also Abdussaid 1966-1967, p.158, and plates XLVIb, XLVIIa: Abdussaid remarks that "these fragments were used in a late rebuilding of the back wall of the mihrab"). The Development of Medina Sultan in fact, was as for Ajdabyiah, in the Fatimid period. In fact, also in this case, the mosque now surviving at Medina Sultan was probably a much enlarged rebuilding of an older and smaller mosque, carried out by the Fatimid caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allahin the middle of the 10th century (see Fig. 95). The excavated site measures 41m in length and 31m in width, with a courtyard 19 x 21m (see Fig. 95 No 1) and a prayer hall at the heart of the mosque measuring 12 x 26m (see Fig. 95 No 4). This prayer-hall was divided laterally into three aisles of equal size parallel to the qibla wall (see Fig. 95 No 1), with a cross-axis between the central doorway and the mihrab, embellished by engaged semi-columns framing the piers of the vaulting. The marble bases used here were probably taken from a Byzantine building, whereas the capitals, which have hitherto been found, are of limestone and are of Islamic manufacture. The solid square foundation of rubble masonry in the north-west corner of the courtyard is the base of the minaret (see Fig. 95 No 6) (Abdussaid 1966-1967, p.156-158).

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[77] It is interesting to note that no less an astrononomical authority than Pascal Descamps at the Paris Observatory suggested in 2017 this simple and elegant procedure (Vahé Ter Minassian, 'Un bureau d'enquêtes (presque) incollable', *Le Monde* 6.ix.2017, science et médecine p 3). On the orientation of mosques see King 1985.
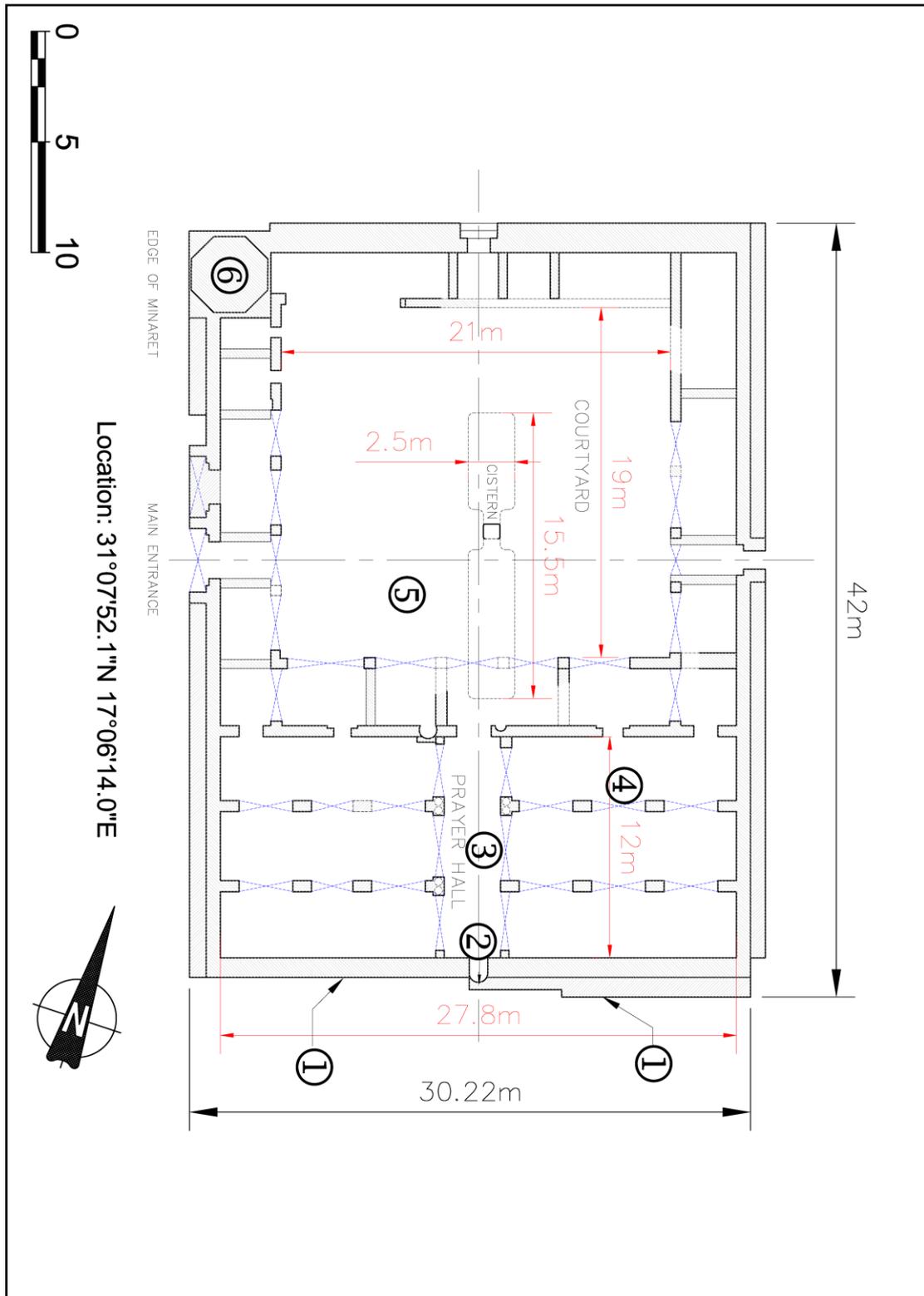
Fig. 95 The plan of Medina Sultan (Surt) Mosque. Drawing by: Abdulhamid Abdussaid. Redrawn by Enas M. Bubtana

Abdussaid first suggested in 1964 that "breaks in the porch of the sanctuary facade" indicated that at some point the mosque had been enlarged (Fehérvári 2002, p.28 and p.29, plate 6). There are two vertical discontinuities in the brickwork of the sanctuary wall (plate 6), where there is no lacing together of the brickwork. This seemed to indicate that a wall that originally ended in a vertical edge was extended sideways with a new piece of brickwork to form a foundation layer for a wider wall above, which was laid in smoothly interlaced and mortared horizontal layers above the extended foundation layer. The enlargement of the mosque is now dated to the mid-10th century, at about the time, that is, of the passage across Cyrenaica of caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allahin. As well as this mid-tenth century enlargement of an earlier and smaller structure, there is evidence too of a later, third phase of minor alterations, which must have been carried out after the mid-11th century (Fehervari 2002, p.35; see also, above, Bongianino's note on the "palmette framing the Ajdabyiah lion").

6.4.3 Pottery

Fehervari suggests that the ceramic remains found at Medina Sultan are evidence of both Fatimid and earlier activity (Fehervari 2002, pp.70, 71, 76). Most of the glazed ware found was *painted in polychrome under clear lead glaze* (Fehervari 2002, p.78); but it is striking that the *lustre ware* that one would expect from a Fatimid site is absent from Surt, as indeed from all other Fatimid sites in Libya (Fehervari 2002, p.85). The pottery, on the whole, does not seem emphatically part of a larger cultural picture, as the enlarged mosque *does*.

6.4.4 Coins

A coin of the Fatimid caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin Allah (342AH/964CE-365AH/987CE) was found by Mohamed Mostafa: on "December 12, 1965, outside the mosque on the southern side a small silver coin bearing the name of the Fatimid caliph Al-Mu'izz Ledin

Allah, in beautiful kufi writing" (Mostafa 1967, p.150). A silver *dirham* of al-Hakim (386AH/1008AH-411AH/1033CE) from the earlier 11th century was found by Fehervari (Fehervari 2002, p.9). Both suggest, it is thought, a town flourishing in the earlier Fatimid period; they suggest "la datation fatimide du site" (Hardy-Guilbert 2010, p.77; see also King 1989, p.202). The town was alive and vital for its inhabitants before the 10th century. It is however, as Hardy-Guilbert puts it, when the Caliph al-Mu'izz was on his way "sur la route de la conquête de l'Egypte," he did no more than take up again a brief sense of the *convenience* of Medina Sultan for a conquering army that the strategic position of this port would have made evident to the first Arab invaders, making the idea (temporarily) real and useful for him again two hundred years later (Hardy-Guilbert 2010, p.77).[78]

6.5 Conclusions and recommendations

Fehervari in 2002 came to the following conclusion about the importance of Medina Sultan (Surt); and about what remained then still to be done: "The Islamic city of Medina Sultan (Surt) was, even at its peak during the middle and second half of the 10th century CE, a modest settlement. It was, however, a prosperous city, a commercial centre with several workshops. All these were possible because the town had its own harbour...Life was possible here since the town had water, partly collected in cisterns, partly because it had a few wells. There were fruit and vegetable gardens around... Medina Sultan (Surt) was an important place and played an eminent role in the Fatimid invasion of Egypt. It was a military and possibly also a naval base, a staging and supply post between Tunisia and Egypt. After the Fatimids occupied Egypt and transferred their centre to Cairo, they lost interest in Ifriqiya...Surt declined not

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[78] 'Cette idée aurait été reprise deux siècles plus tard par le calife fatimide al-Mu'izz sur la route de la conquête de l'Egypte, et se serait concrétisée par ses interventions architecturales et de nouveaux aménagements dans la ville.'

because of the Hilalian invasion, but because it lost its role, given to the city by the Fatimids. The Hilalian invasion was only the final blow. The archaeological work at Medina Sultan (Surt) is far from complete. Any future work should concentrate on the Central Mound...The area around the *Qibli* gate likewise deserves more attention. The connection between this gateway and the South-eastern Fort should be investigated. Another important area that deserves attention is the North Fort, where several walls and the outline of a round tower are visible (Fehervari 2002, pp.114-115)".

The French archaeological mission in the early years of this century emphasised in its reports the conclusions reached by Fehervari in 2002, based themselves on forty years of investigation of the site. It seems of particular significance that this Islamic city was not constructed on the remains of anything earlier, so that the shape and layout of whatever was built was in response to then current convictions or suppositions as to what an Islamic city should be. There was no conversion to later use of what already remained from any classical or Byzantine city. On the other hand, there is evidence from an early period that the population of Surt was of very mixed credal and racial elements, and indeed that the dialect of Arabic spoken was almost unintelligible to visitors because of linguistic borrowing and 'contamination' from other sources. The building work, then, gives us a simple picture of an early Islamic city; which was, however, home to a population very far from simple in its origins and activity. Medina Sultan (Surt) is plain and simple; Medina Sultan is immensely complex beneath that simple 'constructed' level, a level constructed in a curiously *necessary* way because of the survival value of the materials used for military rather than private and domestic purposes. It is difficult to make sound conclusions based on a 'historical' model.

Chapter 7 : Conclusion

7. The aim of this chapter

In spite of the fact that the war in Libya has not allowed me to do extensive fieldwork and consult museums as I would have hoped, the interdisciplinary research here presented, combining history, ancient sources, inscriptions and archaeology, has allowed me to enhance our knowledge and understanding of the process of transition from the Byzantine into the Islamic world. The purpose of this chapter is to pull together all the results of this work, to identify the major trends, and to mark new directions for research.

7.1 Ancient cities and new societies: restructuring the urban space

Cities always reflect the changes that occur in society. Society under the Byzantine rule in Cyrenaica had already changed at the moment of the Islamic conquest and the transition from the Roman urban organisation into a lesser-organised urban landscape had already occurred. Therefore, the Arab conquest did not change substantially the urban layout, it did not modify the urban structure. Byzantine cities in North Africa had already evolved in two distinct ways:

1. City walls had been constructed or restructured (although the urban space had shrunk, so the portion actually included within the walls was a lot smaller than was the case with the classical city); and some structures inside the walls had been transformed into forts (this is, for instance, the case of Lepcis Magna or Carthage);

2. In the absence of substantial city walls, the creation of the city in nuclei was characterised by the presence of a church and a fort and dwellings (as for

instance in the case of Sbeitla - Sufetula). This organisation does not change after the Arab conquest and we can identify a substantial continuity in the type of occupation, mostly involving further subdivision inside the houses. The Early Islamic city presents little difference from the late Byzantine cities in North Africa (Leone 2007 and more recently Fenwick 2016 and 2019). The cases of Tolmeitha (Ptolemais) and Taucheira (Tocra) are no exception. Taucheira was characterised by the presence of a city wall and a fort inside the city. It is very likely that all these fortified elements which had characterised Byzantine city, ceased to function as defensive in the Early Islamic period and became mostly residential areas connected with production activities, connected with small family-run business or for self-subsistence. Tolmeitha saw the north-eastern quadrant of the city mostly used in this way, with the so-called House G being effectively a large sector intensively inhabited, with the presence of two-storey buildings, and evidence of commercial production. Similar evidence has been recorded in the triapsidal hall (see Fig. 96).
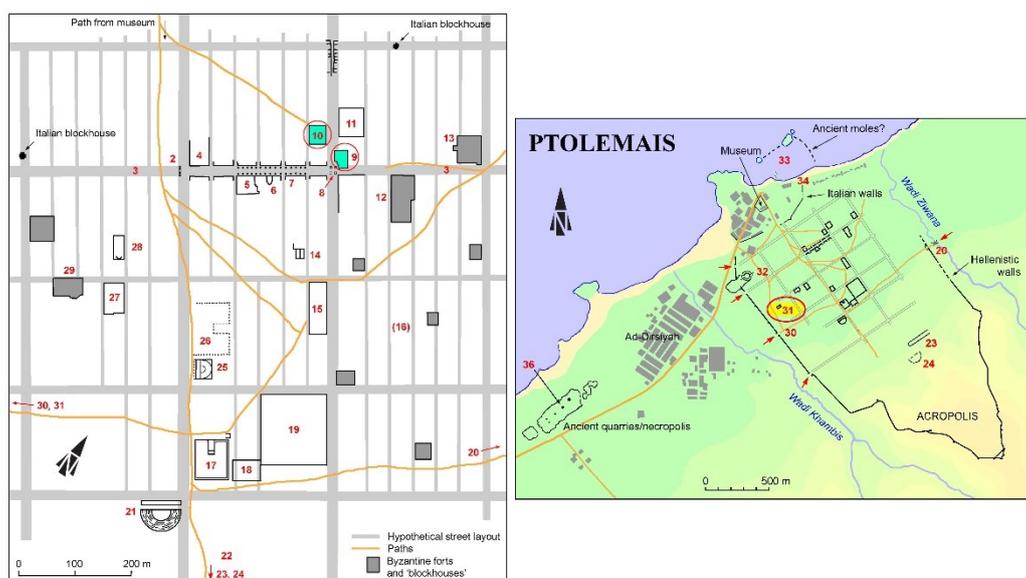
Fig. 96 Map of Tolmeitha (Ptolemais) showing areas used in the Islamic period: North quadrant (No 9), house G (No 10); west church (No 31) (after Kenrick, pp.66-67).

Data are not accurate enough to identify all the steps of the effective transformations which occurred in the urban buildings of Tolmeitha, neither is possible to identify fully the period of occupation and abandonment of these structures. The data indicate clearly the presence of a city that was intensively inhabited. Unfortunately, the excavations are not accurate enough for us to fully understand the structure of such cities. However, we do know that two major features (as we will see below) characterise early Islamic cities: a fort (or rather a residential palace?) and a mosque for religious practices. It has been argued that Islamisation did not immediately follow the conquest (Amari 2011).[79] The conquest of North Africa did not develop as a religious conquest, but rather as an economic opportunity to open up new trade routes, for instance for the trade of slaves and gold (see chapter 4). The construction of monumental mosques therefore was often not immediate. It is not to be doubted that cities like Taucheira (Tocra) and Tolmeitha (Ptolemais), which continued to be occupied saw the construction of a Muslim religious complex, but the excavations probably have not identified it. Reasons for this may be many, but it is also possible that these buildings were dismantled and their construction materials reused elsewhere. After the abandonment of these cities, they often became quarries offering building materials for new constructions. This is probably the case with Taucheira (Tocra), where a very early Kufic inscription has been recorded (See chapter 2, 2.1.4.4 inscription n.1) bearing a text normally on display at the entrance of mosques. It is therefore possible to argue that some sort of mosque was present in the city quite early after the conquest. The writing does not suggest an important official occasion for the text; therefore, it is possible that the building constructed was rather limited in size and monumentality.

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[79] The army was not entirely composed of Muslims, but by soldiers of different faith and religion (Wadād al Qādi 2016).

7.2 Muslims and Christians: the shared urban space.

As discussed throughout the thesis, one of the major issues is the end of Christianity, and the relationship between Islam and other religions. The lack of detailed archaeological materials, with chronologies based mostly on assumptions, make it particularly difficult to provide a clear picture of the situation. To date there is no archaeological material which clearly points to a continuity of the presence of Christian communities into the early Islamic period with certainty, although the survey conducted by Goodchild and Ward-Perkins during the period of the British protectorate of Libya (Ward Perkins et al 2002), has shown that many churches probably continued to be occupied in some form after the Islamic conquest. In fact, although they do not indicate specifically an early Islamic occupation, the descriptions seem to suggest later interventions. In some case there is reference to the transformation of these buildings. To reconsider in more detail, the evidence about Christianity, we have to return to our three case studies, which show evidence of continuing occupation.

The church in Tolmeitha or Ptolemais, as the city is referred to in Ward-Perkins' article of 1943, more commonly referred to as the 'West Church' (not to be confused with the 'West Central Church' only partially excavated by 1943), produces some interesting evidence. The West Church is described by Ward-Perkins as "a building of severely simple design" (Ward-Perkins 1943, p.131), but nevertheless has a "purposeful simplicity".

Evidence of the presence of a church is also recorded at Barqa (el-Merj). This city in terms of religious transition from the Late Antique to the early Islamic period is of particular significance for Ward-Perkins (1943, pp.137–8), in the context of the persistent "Libyan influence" visible in the city and the survival of Christian

communities to the 10th century, in the new capital of Arab Cyrenaica (Ward-Perkins et al. 2002, p.257). Accordingly, and with the exception of "a few 5th century capitals", Ward-Perkins (1943, p.135) records little evidence of the early Christian period. It is rather the Byzantine chancel-slabs, together with a small collection of other inscribed and decorated stonework, that form the best physical evidence for a settled Christian community. Compared favourably to chancel-slabs produced at Proconnesus (Marmara, in Turkey), exported "throughout the length of Justinian's Empire", the chancel-slabs are thought to be identical to those discovered in Ravenna, at Sabratha, and in Apollonia (Ward-Perkins 1943, p.136). The Christian items viewed and recorded in the *Lapidarium* at Barqa (el-Merj) by Ward Perkins in 1943 have since been dispersed, and their location is currently unknown (Ward-Perkins et al. 2002, p.258). In the case of Barqa, however, it is arguable that a Christian community continued to exist after the conquest, as Christian bishops are recorded. Taucheira (i.e Tocra) receives only cursory mention by Ward-Perkins (1943, p.125) as containing traces of two early Christian churches, of the same simple plan as those of Tolmeitha (Ptolemais). To the Byzantine period, Ward Perkins (1943, p.135) makes only a single reference, with regard to the Justinianic rebuilding of the city walls at Barqa (el-Merj). The analysis never extends to the early Islamic period, and there is an assumption that all the churches were abandoned after the Arab conquest.

Unfortunately, the stratigraphy which has been removed with no recording is lost for ever, but the Kufic inscriptions recorded in the west church of Tolmeitha and Ras al Hilal, deserve some consideration. In both cases, (Tolmeitha, inscr. 7 and Ras al Hilal, inscr. 2), fragmentary texts refers to 'Dayr'. The churches have been non-stratigraphically excavated and many data are lost, but these inscriptions could provide some hints of the presence in the town of a Christian community after the Arab

conquest. The word Dayr is normally used to refer to Christian monasteries (Fowden 2004), in both medieval text and modern topography, especially in the east.

Early Arabic sources in North Africa refer to the Christian presence, up to at least the 10th century, but only 3 bishops are attested in this last phase. Although archaeology is silent due to the loss of data, Arabists working on texts effectively are discussing whether Christianity in North Africa ends at the time of the Almohads, in fact a decree dated to the 13th of July 1159 issued the call for conversion or death of the Christian population of Tunis (Handley 2004, pp.307-8). An edict in 875 established that Christian and Jewish had to wear symbols on their clothes (Handley 2004, p.303). The relationship between the different religious communities probably varied on a regional basis, because for instance in the Jebel Nafusa, at Sharwas a 10th century inscription refers to equality between Muhammad, Judaic patriarchs and Jesus (Handley 2004, p.305). Immediately after the conquest however we know of the coexistence between different religions, for instance there is reference of Qustas or Constans, who was in charge of building a new church in the 8th century for the Christian community of Qairawan[80].

However, despite the fact that this evidence is referring to other parts of North Africa, in Cyrenaica, as mentioned above, the Christian presence is still attested in the 10th century; it is therefore arguable this progressive disappearance of the Christian community extended to the whole North African provinces.

In particular, there was a strict connection and community of interests between Muslims and Christian monastic communities. Muslims in the 8th and 9th centuries. especially, looked upon monasticism with some reverence, as they were particularly

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[80] M. al-Ka'b (ed), Ibrahim ibn Qasim al-Raqiq al-Qayrawani – Ta'rikh Ifriqiyyah wa al maghrib (Tunis 1968, pp.184-185 and Talbi 1990, pp.316-7.

impressed by the Christian monks that they met in the course of the conquest of new territories. They assimilated many ideas and practices from the monks, and in due course they fused the idea of the gihād with an ambivalent understanding of Christian monasticism (Sahner 2017), creating the figure or monks/warriors who were living in ribāts. This admiration is reflected also in some passages of the Quran (5.82 Surah Al Ma'ida), praising priests and monks who do not behave arrogantly. The specific attention by the conqueror towards the monastic communities is also attested by Muslim reports that the Prophet offered special protection to the Christian monks when his armies conquered new areas (Livne-Kafri 1996).

Therefore, it is arguable that at least for a hundred years monasteries continued to be active within the in North Africa. Although we know from written texts that many monasteries existed in North Africa in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, archaeological traces of them have proved to be very difficult to find. The reasons for this probably relates to the nature of monasticism in North Africa which developed from Augustine. We know that Augustianian monk were at the beginning living in houses and for the later period we know very little on the organisation of monastic settlements (Leone 2007a). The inscription in Tolmeitha (Ptolemais) in the West Church and at Ras al Hilal both referring to 'Dayr', offer some possible interpretations. It is possible that the churches were only part of a much larger monastic complex, which has yet to be uncovered (or has been removed by later spoliations), and these were the prayer rooms. There is also the possibility that the church continued to be attended as such and the inscriptions were incised by monks. Either way, this evidence in particular offers the possibility that both churches, at least immediately after the Arab conquest, continued to be used for Christian practices. Similar inscriptions have been recorded, for instance, in Jordan at Qasr al Hallabat: here the complex appeared to have had a

period in which it was used as a monastery and it was later transformed into a fort. After all, ascetic houses had much in common with Ummayad country residences (Fowden 2004), and therefore are archaeologically quite difficult to distinguish.

7.3 New cities and old (?) connections: settling after the conquest

The new Arab province took its name from the city of Barqa (el-Merj) which presumably acquired a certain level of importance, although in this specific case the investigations on the site have not been sufficient to define a picture of the city and how it transformed itself as it assumed its new importance. The Islamic cities which developed from the Islamic conquest, usually followed the same path of development. The new city foundations immediately after the conquest, which were later monumentalised with the construction of a fort (palace) and a mosque, were normally set away from the ancient cities.

A detailed study, which combines textual and archaeological evidence to interpret the new Islamic cities in North Africa, is still missing, the focus being primarily on eastern cities where more is known.[81] Work has been done reassessing the archaeological evidence, looking at archives of old excavations conducted during the colonial period, between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (Leone 2007, Fenwick 2016 and 2019, Stevens 2019), but unless the analysis considers fully the historical events, together with archaeological data and documentary sources (both inscriptions and text), in a comparative study, understanding the form and the development of North African cities is impossible. This thesis has made a contribution in this respect: showing the potential of this approach; and has shown that developing interdisciplinary research on a regional scale allows the shaping and redefinition of

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[81] For instance the volume by Milwricht, Introduction to Islamic Architecture, published in 2010, discusses at length other cities , but when it comes to North Africa only a few lines towards the end of the chapter consider North Africa.

events, approaches and transformations and allows the understanding of how the medieval urban forms were developed, on a regional scale. The same approach can be made for the whole of North Africa. The evidence here for Cyrenaica allows us to categorise settlements and identify different types of development. Classical cities, when they did not acquire an important new political function, appear to have maintained substantially the pattern and the form which was already established in Late Antiquity. These cities were gradually shrinking, the inhabited sectors were reduced, some parts of the former cities were taken over by cultivation. Ashad already occurred in the Late Antique period in North Africa, they maintained the same structural organisation (whether they had evolved in enucleated form or as a town with a city wall), they all had a fort and probably a mosque although archaeologically these have not been found. All the former Roman Byzantine cities followed this pattern, including those which were capital cities, or those that in the restructuring of the process no longer had this function.

The new foundations followed a rather different direction in principle. The new settlement was normally displaced to a point near the old one, but they do not develop on top of the old settlements; they were set apart as totally new foundations, this choice may have been related to reasons connected with the availability of space. They were originally Misr, camps located outside of the city, with tents, mosque and a palace. In the cases in which these urban settlements had a strategic and economic role (being located in a key geographical areas mostly along trade routes) they then developed from Misr to Madina: in this process mosque and palace were monumentalised (Kennedy 2006 and more recently Whitcomb 2012). The Medina showed a more complex type of settlement with the presence of a mosque

(congregational) and a qasr (normally a residential palace)[82]. This development is difficult to identify at Barqa (el-Merj). The reasons may be due to the limited excavations conducted in the city (and more accurate and extended geophysic and resistivity campaign should be conducted); or to the fact that the city of Barqa, never fully developed its monumentality. The province of Barqa always depended from either Egypt or Ifriqyiia and Barqa lost importance commercially in virtue probably of its harbour Tolmeitha (Ptolemais). At the moment the first hypothesis seems to be the most acceptable, given the fact that some official inscriptions dated to this early period have been recorded, signalling the importance of the city. The case of Ajdabiyah shows the evidence of a settlement, which was developed and monumentalised substantially in the Fatimid period. Here we see the construction of a qasr, which is probably a residential palace, similar to the type of building which characterised the early Islamic city. Fatimid cities in fact had a military sector, a palace and mosque and elite residences (Whitcomb 2012, p.621). The excavations at Ajdabiyah have identified the presence of the palace and the mosque; and the space between the two complexes, although not excavated yet, probably would show evidence of inhabited areas. The mosque is, as well as the one recorded at Medina Sultan (Surt /Sirte), a very typical large congregational mosque, with a very large courtyard and an elongated prayer room at the end. The same architecture has been recorded, for instance, at Jerash in the second quarter of the 8th century, a congregational mosque (Walmsley and Damagaard 2005). For comparison with other early Islamic cities, it is arguable that shops or market areas developed all around the mosque. In the case of Medina Sultan (Surt/Sirte) the fort has not been identified, but the mosque was also built in the Fatimid period. The fact that the qibla of the mosque of Sousse is not

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[82] On the different of the various definitions used for forts/residential palaces in early Islamic texts see Eger 2012.

oriented towards Mecca does not have to be seen as a problem. The qibla was not in fact supposed to point to Mecca. In early mosques two alternative possibilities were normally used for measurement and orientation. Either the qibla was oriented to the south, as the Prophet in Madina used to pray not in the direction of the Mecca, but to the south (King 1995, p.255). Alternatively, the qibla was normally oriented to one of the walls of the Kaaba, a specific edifice at the heart of the monumental mosque of Mecca (King 1995, p256) (see Fig. 97).

Fig. 97 A scheme of sacred geography with eight sectors of the world around the Kaaba (after King 1995, p.256 Fig. 3).

Therefore, the fact that the qibla is not oriented towards the Mecca, it being a very early mosque, does not present a problem.

Both cities Ajdabiyah and Medina Sultan (Surt/Sirte) probably developed into Medina and were monumentalised in the Fatimid period, for their location along major trade routes and for their commercial functions.

7.4 Circumstances

It has been, of course, the state of war in and about Cyrenaica persisting throughout the time the writer has spent in preparing this thesis which has also encouraged the sort of approach here adopted. There has been virtually no possibility of any kind of original work in the field during the whole time of this study, and some of the places

originally in the thesis plan for visiting have been simply forbidden to civilian access, or otherwise too dangerous to visit. The thesis as presented here is as it is because there was no other possibility; but it has also been a fortunate chance, one would like to feel, which has resulted in the kind of approach here attempted.

The destruction of buildings, the removal or theft of artefacts, have been commonplace during these years of warfare, but as I said in my first report on my research in 2016 "it is precisely the gravity of the present situation which makes it important that something should be done now, both to survey archaeological progress so far in the whole of the region and to consider afresh the state of our present understanding before irretrievable loss occurs. The author is familiar at first hand with most of the sites here considered and... where there is already damage and loss, my own account may at times be all that can be supplied to fill the gap." Although more or less everywhere in this thesis, the fine focus on what the writer has called 'domestic' reality has been preferred to the coarser focus of large historical event, it is hoped that there is enough 'standing back' in these chapters to allow a general picture of the archaeology of Cyrenaica in the 7th to the 10th centuries to emerge. There have been times when my own rather fleeting and anxious and fearful visits to one or other of the sites described might have been, as I have thought, the last time it was to be seen before bombs and looting destroyed it. In that case, I have been aware, I must try to give as accurate an account as I can of the present state of things. Quite often in the course of these pages, one has had to say that what some previous traveller or visitor saw in the medieval period, or in the 19th century is no longer to be seen, one has had to rely on someone else's account of what has disappeared; and now very much more so, for who knows how much of what I have seen and known will in the next years be

destroyed, a destruction considerably faster and more complete, possibly, than the slow erosion of centuries.

I offer this thesis as a tribute to my own country: my family home is in Benghazi, and has been at times in the midst of the bombing: one is proud to have given some account of the life of past centuries in Cyrenaica, which is still in some way part of our own lives, the lives of those born now and brought up in this place. Now, perhaps even more so than in the past, we suffer at the hands of larger historical forces: our domestic lives so far survive, just about: we have no idea for how long: little wonder that it is with the domestic and the everyday and the ordinary in Cyrenaica of the 7th to the 10th centuries that my sympathy and my loyalty lies.

Appendix 1: The Arabic Texts

Passage 1:

"صار اليها عمرو بن العاص حتى صالح اهلها على ثلاثة عشر الفاً يؤدونها اليه جزيه وقد كتب لهم كتاباً بهذا. "

Passage 2:

" أفتتحها القائد العربي عمرو بن العاص في سنة 22 هـ/642م صلحاً على أن يدفع أهلها خمسة الآلف دينار جزية ، وقد أسلم معظم أهلها ، منها انطلقت الجيوش العربية الفاتحة صوب طرابلس بقيادة عمرو بن العاص ، وفي اتجاه الجنوب نحو أوجلة و زويلة بقيادة عقبة بن نافع."

Passage 3:

البكري في كتابه "المسالك والممالك يقول" و مدينه برقة في صحراء حمراء التربه والمباني فتحمر لذلك ثياب ساكنيها والمتصرفين فيها ....وهي دائمة الرخاء كثيرة الخير....واكثر ذبائح اهل مصر منها ،ويحمل منها الى مصر الصوف والعسل والقطران ...وهي كثيرة الثمار من الجوز والاتراج والسفرجل واصناف الفواكه "

Passage 4:

الادريسي في كتابه (نزهة المشتاق في اختراق الافاق) وصف مدينة توكرة بقوله : "من قافز الى قصر توكرة مرحلتها،وهو قصر كبير عامر آهل ،وفيه قوم من البربر وحوله ارض عامرة ،وسوان يزرع عليها القطاني والشعراء محيط بها "

Passage 5:

اليعقوبي وصف ما من الممكن ان يكون توكرة تعرف أجيه في كتابه(البلدان) بقوله "وعلى ساحل البحر مدينه يقال لها اجيه بها اسواق ومحارس ومسجد جامع واجنة ومزارع وثمار كثيرة...."

Passage 6:

"...جميس بروس اول رحالة بريطاني يزور تاوخيرا 1766 ويلفت الانتباه الى أثارها الا انه خلط بي وصفه لاثار توخيرا وطلميثه فهو يذكر عند وصفه لها انه لم يجد فيها مايستحق الذكر وعند وصف طلميثه يذكر ان بها اسوار وبوابات كامله ومليئه بالنقوش ،وهذا وصف يطابق توخيرا بشهادة ديلا سيلا الذي زار المدينتين عام 1817...."

Passage 7:

"...فاتيه دي بروفييل الذي كان نائب القنصل الفرنسي في بنغازي خلال هذه الاعوام 1846-1852 م ..قام بفتح مجموعة كبيره من المقابر الفرديه وعثر فيها على مجموعة من الاواني المزخرفة والكثير من التماثيل الطينيه...على الرغم من ان حفرياته تعد الاولى في المدينه الا انها لم تكن علميه بل كان الغرض منها الحصول على اللقى الاثاريه ...."

Passage 8:

"...جورج دينس زار توخيرا عام 1865 م قام بمسح شامل لقبورها الفرديه والجماعيه...في 1910 زار توكره فيدريكو هالبهر رئيس البعثة الايطاليه في كريت واعد تقرير عن المدينه وكان تقريره اول التقارير العلميه يكتبها عالم اثري في القرن العشرين ...."

Passage 9:

"... وأهمها المجسات الخمسة الصغيرة التي أظهرت أن الشكل العام للحصن على شكل حرف L وليس مستطيلًا ، وقدم المجس الذي اقيم في البرج الجنوبي معلومات جيدة عن البرج .كماعمل علي لاترك وستوكي ايضا في هذا المبني وقدما معلومات عامة عنه أضافا إلى حد كبير فهم المبنى...."

Passage10:

"اليعقوبي ذكر طلميثه في كتابه (البلدان) بقوله " وعلى ساحل البحر مدينه يقال لها اجيه بها اسواق ومحارس ومسجد جامع واجنة ومزارع وثمار كثيرة وساحل اخر يقال له طلميثه ترسي المراكب فيه في بعض الاوقات ...."

Passage 11:

"الادريسي في كتابه (نزهة المشتاق في اختراق الافاق) وصف مدينة طلميثه بقوله: ".... قصر طلميثة وهو حصن جيد عليه سور حجارة 10 اميال وهو عامر بالناس والمراكب تصقد اليه بالمتاع الحسن من القطن والكتان ويتجهز بالعسل والقطران والسمن في المراكب الواصلة من الاسكندريه وحوله قبائل رواحه من جهة المغرب ومن طلميثه الى جهة المشرق قبائل هيب... "

Passage 12:

"ابن سعيد المغربي في كتابه " الجغرافيا" وصف طلميثه قائلاً " فرضة مشهورة ، وبها قصر فيه يهود تحت خفارة العرب ، ومنها تحمل المراكب الشعير والعسل إلى غيرها ، وقصر اليهود المذكور على هيئة برج كبير وعدة اليهود الذين به إلى يومنا هذا ما يزيد على مائتي يهودي وطلميثا عن الإسكندرية على نحو مسافة شهر ، والمراكب ترسو قبالة قصر اليهود وبالقرب منه ، وتحضر العرب وتبايعهم بالبضائع مقايضة...."

Passage 13:

"ابي الفدا في كتابه" تقويم البلدان" وصف طلميثه وكان ناقلاً لما ذمره ابن سعيد قائلاً " فرضة مشهورة ، وبها قصر فيه يهود تحت خفارة العرب ، ومنها تحمل المراكب الشعير والعسل إلى غيرها ، وقصر اليهود المذكور على هيئة برج كبير وعدة اليهود الذين به إلى يومنا هذا ما يزيد على مائتي يهودي وطلميثا عن الإسكندرية على نحو مسافة شهر ، والمراكب ترسو قبالة قصر اليهود وبالقرب منه ، وتحضر العرب وتبايعهم بالبضائع مقايضة...."

Passage 14:

ابن سعيد المغربي في كتابه " الجغرافيا" وصف برقة قائلاً " ان برقة كانت قاعدة البلاد البارقيه،وهي الان خراب ،ويقال لها اليوم المرج.ويقول ان المراكب تحمل من ميناء طلميثه الكبريت والعسل والقمح والشعير"

Passage 15:

اليعقوبي وصف برقة في كتابه(البلدان) بقوله "ومدينه برقة في مرج واسع وتربه حمراء شديدة الحمرة وهي مدينه عليها سور واواب حديد وخندق ،امر ببناء السور المتوكل على الله ،وشرب اهلها ماء الامطار ياتي من الجبل في اوديه الى برك عظام قدعملتها الخلفاء والامراء لشرب اهل مدينه برقة،وحوالي المدينه ارباض لها يسكنها الجند وغير الجند وفي دور المدينه والارباض اخلاط الناس...."

Passage 16:

ابن حوقل وصف برقة في كتابه (صورة الأرض) قال: " فأما برقة فمدينه وسطة ليست بالكبيرة الضخمة ولا بالصغيرة الزريه ، ولها كور عامرة وغامرة وهي في بقعة فسيحة ...يحيط بها جبل من سائر جهاتها ،وارضها حمراء خلوقية التربه وثياب اهلها أبدا محمرة....ويطوف بها من كل جانب منها بادية يسكنها طوائف من البربر وهي بريه بحرية جبلية.... "

Passage 17:

ابن حوقل في وصف برقة في كتابه (صورة الأرض) يذكر ايضاً : "ووجوه اموالها جمة،وهي اول منبر ينوله القادم من مصر الى القيروان وبها من التجار وكثرة الغرباء في كل وقت مالا ينقطع طلابا لما فيها من التجارة،وعابرين عليها مغربين ومشرقين ذلك انها تتفرد في التجارة بالقطران... والجلود المجلوبة للدباغ بمصر والتمور الواصلة اليها من جزيرة أوجله ، ولها اسواق حادة حارة من بيوع الصوف والفلفل والعسل والشمع والزيت وضروب المتاجر الاصادرة من المشرق والواردة من المغرب وشرب اهلها من المطر بمواجن يدخرها بها واسعارها باكثر الاوقات فائضة بالرخص في جميع الاغذيه... "

Passage 18:

المقديسي وصف برقة في كتابه (احسن التقاسيم في معرفة الاقاليم) بقوله: " قصبة جليلة عامرة نفيسة كثيرة الفواكه والخيرات والاعسال مع يساروهي ثغر قد احاط بها جبال عامرة ذات مزارع...قد احاط بها تربه حمراء شربهم من ابار وما يحوونه من امطار جباب ،يحسن اهلها للغرباء وهم اهل خير وصلاح.... "

Passage 19:

البكري الذي زار مدينه برقة وصفها في كتابه "المسالك والممالك" بقوله و مدينه برقة في صحراء حمراء التربه والمباني فتحمر لذلك ثياب ساكنيها والمتصرفين فيها ....وهي دائمة الرخاء كثيرة الخير....واكثر ذبائح اهل مصر منها ،ويحمل منها الى مصر الصوف والعسل والقطران ...وهي كثيرة الثمار من الجوز والاتراج والسفرجل واصناف الفواكه "

Passage 20:

الادريسي في كتابه (نزهة المشتاق في اختراق الافاق) وصف مدينة المرج برقة بقوله : "فأما مدينه برقة فمدينه متوسطه المقدار ليست بكبيرة القطر ولا بصغيرة غير ان عمارها قليل واسواقها كاسدة،وكانت فيما سلف على غير هذه الصفة ....ارضها حمراء خلوقية التراب وثياب اهلها ابدا حمر ...وكان لها من الغلات في سائر الزمان القطن المنسوب اليها الذي لا يجانسه صنف من اصناف القطن وكان بها والى الان ديار لدبغ الجلود البقرية ..والتمور الواصلة من اوجلة وينقل منها الصوف والعسل والزيت الى الاسيكندريه ومصر عن طريق البحر "

Passage 21:

الرحالة العبدري في رحلته " وصف برقة قائلاً " ليس هنالك مدينه تسمى برقة ولا مدينه مذكورة الا طلميثة ....وبرقة الان عند الناس اسم ارض لا اسم مدينه....."

Passage 22:

يذكره ابن ابي دينار في كتابه " المؤنس في تاريخ افريقية وتونس " الذي اشار الى هذه الحادثة بقوله " ... و رحل المعز من قابس يوم الاربعاء عاشر ربيع الاول من السنة المذكورة (361 هـ) ، ودخل طرابلس يوم الاربعاء الرابع والعشرين من الشهر ، ورحل عنها يوم السبت لثلاث عشرة بقين ربيع الثاني ، فوصل الى سرت في الرابع من جمادى الاولى ، ورحل عنها ونزل بقصره الذي بني له باجدابية ، ورحل من اجدابية فنزل بقصره المعروف بالمعزية في برقة ، وتم في سيره منها الى ان وصل الاسكندرية ... "

Passage 23:

أفتتحها القائد العربي عمرو بن العاص في سنة 22 هـ/642م صلحاً على أن يدفع أهلها خمسة الآف دينار جزية ، وقد أسلم معظم أهلها ، منها انطلقت الجيوش العربية الفاتحة صوب طرابلس بقيادة عمرو بن العاص ، وفي اتجاه الجنوب نحو أوجلة و زويلة بقيادة عقبة بن نافع ."

Passage 24:

" وكغيرها من مدن برقة أيام الخلفاء الراشدين ودولة بني أمية ، كانت اجدابيا تتبع مصر وكان والي مصر هو الذي يختار لبرقة ولاتها حتى العصر العباسي ، حين أصبحت جزءاً من ولاية بنى الأغلب منذ عام 184هـ -800م الى سنة 257هـ 870 م حيث تمكن أحمد بن طولون والي مصر من قبل العباسين أن يضم إليه ولاية برقة. وكانت على ذلك بين الاغالبة في الغرب والطولونيون فالشرق حتى دانت للعبيدين نسبة الى عبيدالله المهدي اول أئمة الفاطمين الذين قضوا على الدوله الأغلبية في تونس سنة 296هـ 908م وقامة دولة شيعية فاطمية في شمال افريقيه."

Passage 25:

"كانت المدينة تتبع مصر إدارياً في القرن الثاني الهجري، وبعد أن تمكن الفاطميون من تأسيس دولتهم في نهاية القرن الثالث الهجري ، أخذوا يرنون بأبصارهم اتجاه الشرق لتحقيق طموحاتهم في السيطرة على مصر ، وقبل هذا عملوا على السيطرة على المدن الواقعة في الطريق الموصل إليها ففي سنة 301هـ " أخرج عبيد الله الشيعي حباسة بن يوسف الجيوش إلى المشرق ، فدخل مدينة سرت ومدينه اجدابيا بأمان، وهرب من كان فيها من جند بنى العباس".

Passage 26:

" وبذلك دخلت مدينه اجدابيا تحت سلطان الدولة الفاطمية ومن ولاتهم عليها ابن كافي الكتامي وكان هذا قبل رحيل الفاطمين الى مصر سنه 361هـــ 971م.   "

Passage 27:

" وفي عهد الخليفة الفاطمي المعز لدين الله تكررت المحاولة حيت بدأ " يعد العدة للرحيل إلى مصر سنة 355 هـ فأمر أن تحفر الآبار على طريق مصر لتأمين الماء للجيش الذي يزمع إرساله لفتح مصر بقيادة جوهر الصقلي كما أمر أن يبنى له في كل موضع مناسب على تلك الطريق قصر يصلح لنزوله."

Passage 28:

" وبعد فتح جوهر مصر سنة 357هـ بدأ المعز في المسير إلى مصر سنة 361 هـ " فوصل سرت في الرابع من جمادي الأولى ورحل عنها ونزل بقصره الذي بني له بأجدابيا." **يقول ابن دينار في كتابه "المؤنس في اخبار افريقيا وتونس"** واصفاً مسيرة الخليفة المعز لدين الله قائلاً "فوصل سرت في الرابع من جمادي الأولى ورحل عنها ونزل بقصره الذي بني له بأجدابيا

Passage 29:

"وفي أثناء وجوده بالمدينة أمر بأن تصنع فيها صهاريج لتجميع مياه الأمطار."

Passage 30:

" وقبل رحيل المعز " نصب على بلاد أفريقيا يوسف بلكين زيري بن مناد الصنهاجي الحميري ، إلا أنه لم يجعل له حكما على جزيرة صقلية ولا على مدينة طرابلس الغرب ولا على أجدابيا ولا على سرت" **يصف ابن الاثير في كتابه "الكامل في التاريخ ج 8 "** مافعل المعز قبل وصوله لمصر " نصب على بلاد أفريقيا يوسف بلكين زيري بن مناد الصنهاجي الحميري ، إلا أنه لم يجعل له حكما على جزيرة صقلية ولا على مدينة طرابلس الغرب ولا على أجدابيا ولا على سرت"

Passage 31:

" وبعد وفاة المعز آلت الخلافة إلى ابنه العزيز نزار (365هـ -386هـ) استقر يوسف بلكين على ولاية أفريقيا وأضاف إليه ما كان أبوه استعمل عليه غير يوسف ، وهي طرابلس وسرت واجدابيا ، فاستعمل عليها يوسف عماله ، وعظم أمره حينئذ" **كما ذكرابن الاثير في الكتاب ذاته "الكامل في التاريخ ج 8"** ايضاً "ولما استقر العزيز في الملك اطاعه العسكر .... أقر يوسف ابن بلكين على ولاية إفريقية واضاق اليه ماكان ابوه استعمل غير يوسف عليه طرابلس وسرت واجدابيا، فاستعمل عليها يوسف عماله وعظم امره حينئذ وامن ناحية العزيز واستبد بالملك وكان يظهر الطاعة مجاملة ومراقبة لا طائل وراءها"

Passage 32:

"وتوترت العلاقات بين بني زيري والفاطميين بعد ذلك عندما توقف المعز بن باديس(المعز بن باديس 398)هـ 4 - شعبان 454هـ1008 / م – 2 سبتمبر 1062م) من أهم أمراء بنو زيري، استمر ملكه بإفريقية والقيروان مدة 47 سنة، وهي من أطول الفترات خلال العهد الزيري، إذ حكم بين 406 .1061-453/1015-1061) عن الدعوة إلى الفاطميين في خطبة الجمعة، ودعا إلى الخليفة العباسية في عام 440هـ. ونتيجة لذلك، وقعت العديد من الأحداث بين الفاطميين و آل الصنهاجي لكن لن نناقش ذلك لأن هذه الأحداث قد وقعت بعيدا عن حدود اقليم برقة. "

Passage 33:

" لكن يبدو ان العامل الاقتصادي كان من اهم العوامل التي دفعت الفاطميين لتشييع هذه القبائل للهجرة الى برقة ومناطق شمال افريقية نتيجة فالمراعي في شرق النيل قلة واصابها الجفاف ولم تعد ملائمة لهذه الاعداد الهائلة من البدو وعائلاتهم وانعامهم. إضافة الى ان عهد الخليفة المستنصر الفاطمي تميز ايضا بكثرة الاضطرابات السياسية وانتشار الأوبئة، فكانت

هذه القبائل مصدر فوضى وقلق للفاطميين في مصر. وربما ما يؤكد اهميه هذا العامل في هجرة هذه القبائل هو انهم بمجرد وصول اول دفعاتهم الى برقة طلبوا من القبائل الأخرى التي ظلت بمصر بالحضور الى برقة لكثرة مراعيها ووفرة مائها فلحقوا بهم. وكان اول استقرار لهذه القبائل في برقة عام 442هـ/1050م. لا شك ان هذه الهجرات باعدادها الضخمة على منطقة المغرب الأقصى كان لها العديد من الاثار السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية. سياسياً رغم ان برقة كانت تابعة للفاطميين واستوطنتها هذه القبائل بمباركة وتشجيع منهم الا ان تبعيتهم لها كانت اسمية فقط ووجود هذه القبائل بها زاد من عزلتها السياسية .".

Passage 34:

"لان برقة في تلك الفترة كانت تحت حكم القبيلة بعد ان تقلص حكم الولاة لها منذ ثورة ابي ركوة سنة 395هـ/1004 م وسيطرة قبيلة بني قرة على برقة حتى قدوم بني هلال وبني سليم الى برقة حيث تركوا إقليم برقة وهاجروا مع بني عمومتهم قبيلة بني هلال الي افريقية (تونس) واستقر بني سليم في إقليمي برقة وطرابلس .لم يقوم بني سليم بانشاء أي كيانات سياسية في إقليم برقة لتمسكهم بأسلوب وطبيعة حياتهم الرعوية البدوية فعاشوا في تجمعات رعوية تعيش على رعي المواشي وزراعة الأرض بالمحاصيل المعتمدة على سقوط الامطار وقد استطاعت قبائل بني سليم يسيطروا على القبائل العربية التي سبقتهم الي برقه من الفتح العربي الإسلامي لها وعلى البربر الذين يعيشوا فيها وايضاً على اليهود المقيمين في بعض مواني برقة مثل طلميثة ودرنه .".

Passage 35:

"اما اقتصادياً لا شك انه كان لهذه الهجرات بعض التأثيرات على الوضع الاقتصادي للإقليم ولكل المغرب الأدنى بسبب كثرة اعداد هذ الهجرات الا ان إقليم برقة كان منهكاً اقتصادياً بسبب الحملات العسكريه التي أرسلت من قبل ولاة بني زيري في افريقية وما تبعها من قتل وتنكيل ومصادرة أموال الأهالي وتشريدهم في برقة حيث ان هذه القبائل عندما وصلت الى الإقليم لم تجد أي مقاومة من قبل من تبقى من الأهالي فيها .لذلك لا صحة للتهويل في الخراب الذي حدث في الإقليم ونسب اليهم بانهم قضوا على الزرع واحرقوا المدن وقطعوا الأشجار والغابات كما ذكر الكتاب والمؤرخين القدامى أمثال ابن الاثير والمراكشي وابن خلدون. "

Passage 36:

ابن خلدون في كتابه "كتاب العبر ودايوان المبتدأ والخبر ج 6" وصف خراب الاعراب اوالبدو لبرقة اثناء هجرتهم بقوله .... "وأما برقة فدرست معالمها وخربت أمصارها وانقرض أمرها. وعادت مجالات للعرب بعد أن كانت دارا للواتة وهوارة وغيرهم من البربر. ...".

Passage 37:

ابن خلدون في كتابه "كتاب العبر ودايوان المبتدأ والخبر ج 4" وصف المدن التي مروا بها "وكانت بها الأمصار المستبحرة مثل لبدة وزويلة وبرقه وقصر حسان وأمثالها فعادت يباباً ومفاوز كأن لم تكن".

Passage 38:

ابن خلدون ايضاً في كتابه "كتاب العبر ودايوان المبتدأ والخبر ج 6" كما ان وصفهم ايضاً بأنها " كالجراد المنتشر لا يمرون بشي الا اتو عليه حتى وصلوا وصلوا افريقيه "

Passage 39:

البكري الذي زار مدينه اجدابيه وصفها في كتابه "المسالك والممالك" بقوله : "ومدينة اجدابية وهي مدينة كبيرة في صحراء ارضها صفا وآبارها منقورة في الصفا طيبة الماء وبها عين ماء عذب ولها بساتين لطاف ونخل يسير بها وليس بها من الاشجار الا الاراك وبها جامع حسن البناء بناه ابو القاسم ابن عبيد الله له صومعة مثمنة بديعة العمل وحمامات وفنادق كثيرة واسواق حافلة مقصودة واهلها ذوو يسار اكثرهم اقباط وبها نبذ من صرحاء لواتة ولها مرسى على البحر يعرف بالماحور ولها ثلاثة قصور بينة وبينها ثمانية عشر ميلا وليس لمباني مدينة اجدابية سقوف خشب انما هي اقباء طوب لكثرة رياحها ودوام هبوبها . وهي راخية الاسعار كثيرة التمر يأتيها من مدينة اوجلة اصناف التمور "

Passage 40:

قد بنى الكثير من المستشرقين أمثال غوتيه وجوليان ارائهم على قول ابن خلذون واحكامه على البدو واكدو ان الازمة الاقتصادية التي سادت القرن الخامس الهجري العاشر الميلادي كان سببها تلك الهجرات للبدو القادمة من مصر الى المغرب الادني. من جانب اخر بعض المؤرخين الحديثين من المستشرقين فندوا هذا هذه الآراء التي جعلت من هجرات بني سليم وبني هلال سبب في عدم الاستقرار وتدهور الوضع السياسي والاقتصادي في المغرب عامة.

Passage 41:

يذكره ابن الكاتب في كتابه " اعمال الاعلام في من بويع قبل الاحتلام ,الجزء الثالث حول المغرب" ان المعز اقام حصناً على كل ثلاثين ميل على طول الطريق الممتد بين المهدية ومصر لتذليل تلك الصعوبات "

Passage 42:

يذكرعلي ابن سعيد المغربي في كتابه " المغرب في حكم المغرب " ذكر ان الطريق الممتدة بين سرت والفيوم كانت اقصر الطرق الى مصر وقد امر الخليفة المعز لدين الله ببناء عدد من الصهاريج على طول الطريق لتخزين مياه الامطار حتى يستخدمها الجنود لتسيهل وصولهم الى مصر"

Passage 43:

يذكرالمقريزي في كتابه " اتعاظ الخلفاء " في سنه خمسة وخمسون وثلاثمائه (965م) امر المعز بحفر الابار في طريق مصر وان يبيني له في كل منزلة قصر فُفعل ذلك"

Passage 44:

كما ذكرابن الاثير في كتابه "الكامل في التاريخ ج 8" ولما استقر العزيز في الملك اطاعه العسكر .... أقر يوسف ابن بلكين على ولاية إفريقية واضاق اليه ماكان ابوه استعمل غير يوسف عليه طرابلس وسرت واجدابيا، فاستعمل عليها يوسف عماله وعظم امره حينئذ وامن ناحية العزيز واستبد بالملك وكان يظهر الطاعة مجاملة ومراقبة لا طائل وراءها"

Passage 45:

كما ذكرابن عذاري في كتابه "البيان المغرب ج1"وبوفاة بلكين بن زيري بن مناد الصنهاجي تولي ابنه المنصور بلكين بن زيري بن مناد الصنهاجي وبعد المنصور تولي ابنه باديس ابن المنصور بلكين بن زيري بن مناد الصنهاجي وكان ذلك 391هـ/1001 م ترك باديس حكم طرابلس والأراضي التابعة لها لبني خرزون الزناتية فلفول بن سعيد بن خرزون"

Passage 46:

أبو القاسم ابن خرداذبه في وصفه لمدينه اجدابيه في كتابه (المساللك والممالك) قال : " ابن خرداذبة في كتابه المسالك و الممالك الذي كتبه عام 846 م ، وقد وضح فيه المسافة بين اجدابية وبعض المناطق المجاورة لها فهي تبعد عن بلبد 24 ميلا"

Passage 47:

اليعقوبي وصف اجدابية في كتابه(البلدان) بقوله : "ومدينة اجدابية وهي مدينة عليها حصن وفيها مسجد جامع واسواق قائمة ، من برنيق اليها مرحلتان ، ومن برقة اليها اربع مراحل "

Passage 48:

ابن حوقل وصف اجدابيه في كتابه (صورة الأرض) قال: " مدينة على صحصاح من حجر في مستواه بناؤها بالطين والآجر و بعضها بالحجارة، ولها جامع نظيف ...، ولها زرع بالبخس، وليس بها و لا ببرقة ماء جار، وبها نخيل حسب كفايتهم و بمقدار حاجتهم، واليها القائم بما عليها من وجوه الاموال .... وخراج زروعهم وتعشير خضرهم وبساتينهم هو أميرها وصاحب صلاتها، وله من وراء ما يقبضه من السلطان لوازم على القوافل الصادرة والواردة من بلاد السودان، وهي ايضا قريبة من البحر المغربي فترد اليها المراكب بالمتاع والجهاز وتصدر عنها بضروب من التجارة، وأكثر ما يخرج منها الاكسية المقاربة وشقة الصوف القريبة الامر وشرب اهلها من ماء السماء".

Passage 49:

البكري الذي زار مدينه اجدابيه وصفها في كتابه "المسالك والممالك" بقوله : "ومدينة اجدابية وهي مدينة كبيرة في صحراء ارضها صفا وآبارها منقورة في الصفا طيبة الماء وبها عين ماء عذب ولها بساتين لطاف ونخل يسير وليس بها من الاشجار الا الاراك وبها جامع حسن البناء بناه ابو القاسم ابن عبيد الله له صومعة مثمنة بديعة العمل وحمامات وفنادق كثيرة واسواق حافلة مقصودة واهلها ذوو يسار اكثرهم اقباط وبها نبذ من صرحاء لواتة ولها مرسى على البحر يعرف بالماحور ولها ثلاثة قصور بينة وبينها ثمانية عشر ميلا وليس لمباني مدينة اجدابية سقوف خشب انما هي اقباء طوب لكثرة رياحها ودوام هبوبها . وهي راخية الاسعار كثيرة التمر يأتيها من مدينة اوجلة اصناف التمور "

Passage 50:

الادريسي في كتابه (نزهة المشتاق في اختراق الافاق) وصف مدينة اجدابية بقوله : "و اجدابية مدينة في صحصاح من حجر مستو ، كان لها سور فيما سلف واما الان لم يبق منها الا قصران في الصحراء والبحر منها على اربعة اميال وليس بها ولا حولها شيء من النبات واهلها الغالب عليهم يهود ومسلمون تجار ، وليس باجدابية ولا ببرقة ماء جار وانما مياههم من المراجل والسواني التي يزرعون عليها قليل الحنطة والاكثر الشعير وضربا من القطاني والحبوب "

Passage 51:

الرحالة العياشي زار مدينه اجدابيه وصفها قائلا : " ثم ارتحلنا من هناك تيامنا على البحر قليلا وبتنا ليلتين في الطريق وفي الثالثة جئنا الى الجابية وفارقنا البحر من المنعم فلا تجتمع طريقنا معه الى التميمى . وفي هذه الجابية آثار عمارة كثيرة وآبار عظيمة منقورة في الحجر وبنيان هائل بالحجر المنحوت وهناك رسم مسجد قديم تهدم ،ووجدنا في بعض حجارته تاريخ بنيانه منقوشا سنة ثلاثمائة"

Passage 52:

يذكر ابن سعيد في كتابه " بسط الارض في الطول و العرض " هذه الواقعة عندما تحدث عن اجدابية " وفيها صنع المعز صهاريج الماء من المطر حيث عزم على فتح مصر من القيروان ".

Passage 53:

اليعقوبي وصف سرت في كتابه(البلدان) بقوله "ومن مدينة اجدابيا الى مدينه سرت على ساحل البحر المالح خمس مراحل من ديار لواته وفيهم قوم من مزانه وهم الغالبون عليها منها الفاروج وقصر العطش واليهوديه وقصر العبادي ومدينه سررت،واهل هذه المنازل واهل مدينه سرت من منداسة ومحنحا وقنطاس وغيرهم،واخر منازلهم على مرحلتين من مدينه سرت بموضع يقال له تورغة وهو اخر حد برقة ومزاته كلها اباضية ...."

Passage 54:

ابن حوقل وصف سرت في كتابه (صورة الأرض) قال: " وسرت مدينه ذات سور صالح كالمنيع من طين وطابيه..ولهم مزارع في نفس البر نقصد نواحيها اذا مطرت وتنتج مصراعيها،ولها من وجوه الاموال والغلات والصدقات في سائمة الابلوالغنم مايزيد على حال اجدابيا...وبها نخيل تجتني ارطابها....ولهم اعناب وفواكه واسعارهم صالحة على مر الاوقات ،ودخلها اوفر من دخل اجدابيا . وهي على غلوة سهم عن البحر في مستواه من رمل وترد المراكب ايضا عليها بالمتاع وتصدر عها بشئ من كالشب السرتي فانه غزير كثير وبالصوف ايضاً ولحوم الماعز اغدى فيها من الضأن وانفع...وشرب اهلها من ماء المطر المختزن في المواجل "

Passage 55:

البكري الذي زار مدينه سرت وصفها في كتابه "المسالك والممالك" بقوله" وهي مدينه على سيف البجر عليها سور طوب وبها جامع وحمام واسواق, ولها ثلاث ابواب قبلي وجوفي وباب صغير الى البحر ليسحولها ارباض ،ولهم نخل وبساتين وابار عذبه وجباب كثيرة .ذبائحهم الماعز ولحمانها عذبه طيبه وليس يؤمل بطريق مصر اطيب من لحومها... لا يبيعون ولا يبتاعون الا بسعر قد اتفق جميعا عليه. وربمانزل المركب بساحلهم موسوقاً بالزيت وهم احوج الناس اليه فيعمدون الى الزقاق الفارغة فينفخونها ويوكونها ثم يصفونها في حوانيتهم وافنيتهم ليري اهل المركب ان الزيت عندهم كثير باير فلو اقام ناهل المركب ماشاء الله ان يقيموا ماباعوا منهم الا على حكمهم ولهم كلام يتراطنون به ليس بعربي ولا عجمي ولا بربري ولا قبطي ولا يعرفه غيرهم "

Passage 56:

الادريسي في كتابه (نزهة المشتاق في اختراق الافاق) وصف مدينة سرت بقوله : "بين مدينه سرت والبحر ميلان عليها سور تراب وما استدار بها رمل....انها في نهاية ضعف ،وكانت لهم اعناب وفواكه ،الا انها قد تلفت في وقتنا هذا ولم يبق بها شئ الا ماكان في بطون الاوديه غير المراكب......"

Passage 57:

ابن سعيد المغربي في كتابه " المغرب في حكم المغرب" وصف سرت قائلاً " وسرت من القواعد القديمة المذكورة في الكتب وقد خربها العرب ، وبقي بها قصور هم يسكنون بها وسرت على البحر ، قال : وبعد أن يتجاوز البحر سرت ينعطف إلى الشمال ويطعن البر الجنوبي في البحر والطريق من هذه الجهة على الفيوم إلى مصر أقرب منها على الساحل وفي الصحاري بين سرت وبين الفيوم عمل المعز بن المهدي الفاطمي صهاريج لما عزم على الوصول إلى مصر“

Appendix 2: Archive data from Ajdabiyah

Unpublished sources

Unpublished papers in the Dept of Antiquities in Cyrene were made available to the present writer and here below transcribed in full, allow us to trace in some detail the early stages of the process by which the importance of the site came to be recognised and investigation began. Item 1 of these papers is a letter from the British army sergeant in charge of Cyrenaica antiquities in general shortly after the end of the Second World War. The report probably dates from the middle 1940s, since it is concerned with the dangerous state of the vaulting in what the writer describes as 'the Church', and which later proved, upon investigation, to be a Fortress-Palace:

Item 1:

[Dept of Antiquities, Cyrene: typescript, headed in handwriting: Agadabia, written in the middle 1940s]

Maj. Jackson, HQ, BMA, Barce.

Sir,

I visited Agedabia on July 26th-28th. The condition of the Church is good on the whole, but part of the barrel vaulting on the N side of the nave has settled outwards and is pressing back a section of the wall on that side. As it is not feasible to reconstruct at the present moment, the best treatment is to shore in three places, a work that can be carried out in a few hours. With the cooperation of Capt. Johnson I showed a local Arab carpenter what needed doing, and he will undertake the work subject to your approval. The cost will be 40pt; it should make the place safe for many moons. Should I hear from you that the expenditure is permitted, I will see that the necessary timber

is sent to Agedabia from here. It would, I imagine, be a matter of asking PWD to forward the material from Barce when it reaches there.

I am sending my monthly report by the same post; attached to it you will see some notes on the archaeology of Barce that may be of interest. It was only on my return from Agedabia and Benghasi that I realised how difficult it will be for the work to go on smoothly here without the presence of some responsible NCO; I found an amazing accumulation of small business awaiting me. In the event of my receiving the compassionate leave which I applied for, do you think there is any chance of arranging for the periodical visit of some NCO, preferably one who knows some Italian? I should have discussed it with Maj. Hyslop, but did not see the matter quite so clearly as I do now.

[signature missing] Sgt.,

i/c Antiquities, Cyrenaica.

PROGRESS REPORT: -

Our programme has been the following: -

After consultation with the DIRECTOR GENERAL OF ANTIQUITIES in TRIPOLI, we studied the reserve collections of ISLAMIC POTTERY in the MUSEUM in TRIPOLI, photographs of which were taken for further study.

We then visited the site of MEDIAEVAL SULTAN, the history of which is closely linked to that of AJDABIYAH. We were particularly interested in the MOSQUE at SULTAN which in size and general appearance apparently resembles that of AJDABIYAH.Immediately on arrival in AJDABIYAH we visited the standing Islamic monuments and carefully examined the area of the cemetery. After consultation with ABDULHAMID ABDUSSAID [see item 2] we began a series of soundings to determine a) whether the mounds within the cemetery area represented the remains of the

mediaeval city, b) to determine the extent of that city.We must emphasise that this programme of soundings has only just begun, and MR. HUGH [sic] BLAKE, M.A. [see item 4, by Hugo Blake], will be returning shortly for a further three week period to complete this programme [the dating at the head of item 4 allows item 3 to be approximately dated as well].

RESULTS: -

We may summarise the results achieved so far as follows: -1/ We agree entirely that the mounds in the cemetery are largely, if not wholly artificial.

2/ A wide scatter of MEDIAEVAL ISLAMIC POTTERY, comparable with material from SULTAN, and including a fragment of STEATITE similar to material from FUSTAT, several pieces of MEDIAEVAL GLASS, and a coin, possibly AGHLABID, show that the site was undoubtedly occupied in MEDIAEVAL times.

3/ In addition to ephemeral building traces, probably of recent date, which may cover much of the surface of the area, we have already found traces of MUD BRICK WALLS, which may belong to the MEDIAEVAL period.

4/ In addition to the above we have begun to excavate the area immediately adjacent to the MOSQUE with interesting results.

RECOMMENDATIONS: -

1/ Pending further investigation of the site, we recommend that any extension to the present cemetery should be carefully controlled.

2/ At the conclusion of MR. BLAKE's soundings, the results should be considered with a view to large-scale excavations of the MEDIAEVAL ISLAMIC CITY in the near future.

3/ In any case the JAMI' MOSQUE and its immediate vicinity merit total and meticulous excavation by experienced staff.

CONCLUSION: -

AJDABIYAH, with the FORTRESS PALACE and the JAMI' MOSQUE alone, is the most important MEDIAEVAL ISLAMIC site between CAIRO and QAIRAWAN. If taken in conjunction with its associated cities of SULTAN and BARCE/Al MARJ, it represents an area which will provide an important link in the development of early FATIMID architecture, between the foundation of MAHDIYA and the earliest FATIMID buildings in CAIRO. We need hardly add that the presentation of this material would be of great interest to all scholars of ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE. D.B. WHITEHOUSE, M.A., PH. D [with a handwritten signature: Antony Hutt] A.M. HUTT, M.A.

Item 1 is closely followed by Hugo Blake's completion of the programme of preliminary excavation begun by Whitehouse and Hutt, item 2 being Blake's detailed report on his three weeks of work in May/June 1971.

Nine trenches were opened, according to Blake's report, and the findings were sufficiently interesting to justify a recommendation that modern use of the whole site should be severely restricted, even though the results of the excavations were 'far from certain'. Some structures possibly 11th century were seen. No associated material of certain date was identified.

Item 2:

[Dept of Antiquities, Cyrene: typescript dated May/June 1971 by Hugo Blake, being the 'second report' on the site, the first being item 3 above]

EXCAVATIONS AT AJDABIYAH, MAY * JUNE 1971

A second report by HUGO BLAKE.

1- Preamble. A generalised report on the site has already been submitted [ie item 3] and this report is limited to a short factual account of the finds made during the excavations.

2- *The excavations*. Nine trenches were opened. The two larger ones (A & B) were planned to yield information about the mosque and the city wall. Others were placed far apart about the site in relation to surface structures. The bull dozed [sic] mudbrick wall (NE corner) city wall and the Mosque (towards NW corner) provide one set of evidence for C11 occupation of the northern end of the site. Coursed mudbrick visible in the sides of recently dug holes to the E of the Gialo road and the contours of the hilloks [sic] to the north of the cemetry [sic] suggest that a great part of the city lies <u>outside</u> the modern cemetery walls. Small trenches laid in the south were ambiguous. Certain mudbrick structures with suggestive C11 tendencies were located in sites E (as tumble in section), in D (fine mudbrick wall corner similar to NE corner wall) and in J (mudbrick on top of stones courses with bonded buttress. Site G (rock cut graves) may well indicate where the C11 cemetery was outside the city walls.

3- *Plans and sections*. were made of every site and inked copies were deposited with Abdulhamid Abdusaid. The small scale large plans relating the individual sites to the modern cemetery walls and the town plan were made by him.

4- *Finds*. Pottery, bones and small finds have been put in marked bags. All pottery has been washed preliminarily and marked with the number of the site and layer: e.g. A1.B6 means Ajdabiyah 1st season. Site B layer <u>6</u>. F letters, such as A1.CF6 refer to the feature 6 in site C. To avoid confusion F and I letters have not been used to designate sites. The letters M (mosque) and S (surface) refer to unstratified finds found during the clearance of Mosque dumps or whilst perambulating the Surface of the site. All material was kept except material found in the 1. clearance layers, where a selection was made.

5- *Conclusions*. The results of these excavations are far from certain. Some structures possibly C11 were seen. No associated material of certain date was identified (which

may not be surprising as distinctive glazed pottery may have been rare in this period).

But the city is there and it is most unlikely that mudbrick structures of sites D, E and J are Roman or Turkish. The misleading surface features (B,C,K for examples), the presence of recent buildings (e.g. Site A) on the site and the lack of relation between C11 surface finds and structures beneath point up the inadequacies of chance trench placing. Any successful further excavations will have to be on a large scale, employing not only skilled labour and staff using sophisticated machinery (telescopic alidades, tubular scaffolding towers, for examples) but also earth moving machinery to facilitate the removal of recent and comparatively uninformative levels.

Meanwhile it is imperative that burying in the present area be stopped (site J was found in the hole of grave makers on the edge of the present growing cemetery). It is too late to limit building to the N. of the cemetery but to the E. preventive measures should be taken. The only area of the modern cemetery likely to be free of C11 structures is that to the S. of site G.

6- Gratitude. The season of excavations would not have been possible without the administrative labours and the archaeological advice of [sic] Abdulhamid Abdusaid.The open and efficient cooperation of all members of the Dept. of Antiquities is appreciated.

N.B. Throughout this report the N. referred to is NORTH taken as the direction of the present town centre (or the sea). In fact, this approximates nearer to W.

SITE A and AE (A extension)

lie to the south of excavated courtyard of the Mosque. The trenches were laid out with intention of finding the SW corner of the original Qibla wall. In the first trench 4m x 8m (site A) a modern structure of cement lined stone walls, benches and channel was encountered. Extension of the trench (site AE) revealed the further ramifications of this

structure. the [sic] intrusive pit F9 showed a wall of mosque dimensions. Objective accomplished. The inked drawings indicate more clearly than a verbal description the structure revealed (plan) and the stratigraphy (sections).

<u>Layers and finds as bagged</u> (Bones not described)

1- Clearance layer in original trench A. Modern porcelain, stoneware; "local pottery", lamp fragment + other potsherds. Glass (inc def. modern), cartridges, flint block, bronze plate. AE 1- Is the clearance layer within the modern structure in the extension trench; Glass, carabinieri button.

2- is the stratum below 1. to the west of the main wall of the modern structure in A. Pottery: "local", collander [sic] fragment, stonware [sic] + Glass.? token, porcelain. Blue green glazed rim sherd that could be ancient.

3- This and following layers lie within trench AE. Fallen stones and mortar overlying bench to East of channel. Local pottery + Queen fragment, modern glass, iron nails.

4- (i)? robbery layer of the modern structure: hard mortar/mud lying under 3. Large base Fragment with 2 bronze wire balls inside, local + Iron, bronze needle. (ii) bottom of channel: loose sand. Wood, modern needle.

5- Clearance layer on East side of trench outside East flanking wall. Brown dec yellow glazed sherd + Glass, iron, bronze wire.

6- Mortar to sandlayer below 5. Local + Glass, iron, etc...

7- Wall stone tumble. Below 7. Sroneware [sic], iron nails.

8- Deep clearance to north of n. flanking wall. Pottery. Tin cans.

F9. Intrusive pit that cuts through all layers on s. side of trench. two tins cans. Three potsherds. Unusually small quantity of finds for recent intrusion and blown sand nature of fill.

Conclusion: all the material shows that these layers were laid down in recent times. They indicate that the structure overlying the Mosque must be modern. The depth to which the discovered mosque wall extends shows that further excavation would reveal more closely associated material and that a building of similar construction to the mosque courtyard exist [sic] to the south of the mosque courtyard.

SITE B

One of the two major (A is the other) sites on which energies were concentrated. This 15m x 3m trench was laid across the line of sandunes [sic] running parallel to the modern west wall of the cemetery in the hope of locating the C11 city walls against which it might have piled up. A series of graves and? hearths were encountered above an irregular curving mudbrick wall. A sondage to the west of this showed sand continuing to a noteworthy depth below bedrock.

Layers an [sic] finds as bagged Pottery was found in every layer (bar 8). Local was present in each group. only exceptional types are mentioned here.

1- General clearance in sand of dullish brown colour. Filter jug, combed, a lot of GLAZED C11. Glass, nail, cartridge. Lamps.

2- Arbitrary layer to distinguish from 1. Glass, nails, anon. bronze, soapatone [sic].

3- Layer in which? hearths appear in clean blown sand. Graves also, which in some cases are intrusions inadequately isolated. Glass, nail, bead OR spindle whorl.

4- Layer in the above dug in our absence. GLAZED sherd, soapstone vessel, glass.

5- Clean yellow sand with some hearth lines at East end of trench. Otherwise banded to like [?sic]natural. Pottery.

6- Clearance around mudbrick wall. Iron slag, glass, GLAZED SHERD.

7- Sondage. Still clean yellow sand. Lamp fragment.

8- Ash layer and below. Under 7. Either no finds OR none kept separate.

Conclusions: Surface contours misled us. The wall with its associated "Local" pottery may well be of recent date. The dune looks as though the build up could be rapid to judge from the vertical gaps between the hearth layers. This dune build up is likely to relate to old cemetery wall, which lies to the East. The comparative plenty of glazed pottery in 1. suggests that surface finds are no indication of the location of related structures.

SITE C

A small trench laid across possible linear feature capped with nud [sic]. It lies between sites B and J and the present burying area within the cemetery. The mud capped feature appeared illusory. A broad stone built wall of a crude nature was revealed in the western end of the trench.

Finds as bagged comparatively few.

1- Clearance layer through sandy earth and small stones. pottery inc. stoneware.

2- Among and beneath stone wall tumble. Beneath 1. in western section. Pottery inc. "local" and a short tubular spouted jug.

F6. The misnumber given to material found under 1. in eatern section. Pot. inc. local. Glass.

Conclusion: an uninteresting trench which might reveal more on deeper exploration.

SITE D

Trench in SE corner of the modern cemetery laid over a dip between two low banks, which was thought to be the debris of a robber trench. On excavation two features were found - a stone wall of poor quality reaching to the surface in the south end of the trench and a mud brick wall of fine quality to the northern end of the trench. This last feature was identified during the last day of the excavation and unfortunately rapid

cleaning and partial reexcavation did not allow for adequate record of stratigraphy, which includes a collapsed thin white? wall plaster as well as tumbled mud brick.

<u>Finds as bagged</u> - comparatively few.

1- Pottery inc. local.

2- Pottery inc. local, <u>green glazed</u> base and large white plaster fragments.

<u>Conclusion</u>: This is one of the most important discoveries of the excavation (cf. site J and to a lesser extent site E). The mud brick wall is finely laid, apparently the corner of some structure. The brick size and nature is comparable with that of the? city wall in the NE corner of the modern cemetery. The presence of fine? wall plaster suggests we have a structure of some sophistication.

<u>SITE E</u>

is in the eastern part of the modern cemetery enclosure. A trench was laid across what appears to be the E. wall of a rectangular structure whose walltops are visible on the surface. This structure was selected for investigation as the stone employed resembles that of the mosque.

<u>Layers and finds as bagged</u> (see inked drawings. Bones not desceibed [sic].)

1- Clearance layer. Sand and sandy earth. Pot inc. "local".

2- To East of wall under 1. in sandy earth. Arbitrary layer. Pottery inc. local; lamp; glass base, etc...

3- Arbitrary layer within tumbled stone wall layer to West of wall. 3 sherds. See 7. also.

4- To east of wall. Tumbled mudbrick layer. No finds.

5- To east below 4. Soft sand with ash layers. Pot inc. local

6- To East below 5. Into hard mud onto hard white surface 5 sherds inc. local.

7- To west of wall. See 3. Continuation and bulk of tumbled "conctrete" [sic] wall in loose sand where percolated. Local pot and dec. tin glazed bowl base.

8- Below 7. Loose sand and ash layers. Fresh rodent skulls and plenty of almost complete "local" pottery.

Conclusions: The finds under the collapsed stone wall to the west and the mudbrick to the east include "local" pottery which may be of recent date. If so, the rectangular structure is unlikely to belong to the C11 Islamic city.

SITE G

lies across the deep bulldozer W-E trench in the southern part of the modern cemetery. Excavation was limited to clearing to bedrock where a few graves had been cut.

1- & 2- Archaeologically undifferentiated clearance of mud and mortar. Pottery (inc. 1 C11 sherd) and glass (Inc. 1? Roman ampoule fragment).

Conclusion: There is a possibility that these graves may antedate the modern cemetery.

SITE H

is a 3m x 4m trench laid out in the NW corner of the modern cemetery to test the extent of the C11 town in an area where the sand is not built up very much. The wall over which it was placed is shallow. Cut in the bedrock at the bottom of the trench a small gulley to the S. leading perhaps to a shallow recessed area to the N. of this wall may be connected with water collection.

Finds and layers as bagged

1- Clearance layer in yellow sand pot and glass.

2- Yellow sand to S. of wall. Local pottery inc. partial red glazed sherd, tiny green/blue alkaline sherd, samian sherd. Cartridges, glass.

3- Yellow sand to N. of wall. No local pot, samian sherd; glass.

Conclusion: Local pottery and cartridges suggest a recent occupation. The presence of 2 samian sherds indicates Roman period activity somewhere in the vicinity.

SITE J

lies between sites B and C just within the old cemetery wall. It was excavated as weathered fine coursed mudbrick was seen in the section of a hole being used as a source of sand for cement in present tomb making. This feature turned out to rest on a wall made of roughish flat stones and hard mud. Adjoining it on the north end is an apparently bonded buttress of the same build.

Finds and layers

1- Clearance to west of wall in loose sand and some mudbrick tumble. No finds kept.

2- Below i through mud brick and clean sand hard white surface. Pot. inc. "local".

3- Clearance to East of wall through sand etc. No finds kept.

4- Layers of alt. sand and mud brick agglomerate. Below 3. Pot inc. local and filter jug.

5- Below 4. and ash layer at E. end of trench. Clean sand onto hard mud surface. Pot inc. local and bronze frag.

Conclusion: This with E and D is one of the most important finds of the excavations. Its preservation is threatened and urgent action should be taken to avert burying in this area. The structure is of considerable interest and well preserved unlike vestigial D and uncertain E it represents the most impressive structure apart from the? city wall (NE corner) and the Mosque discovered to excavations.

SITE K

lies in the southern part of the site between sites G and C. The trench was laid out over what appeared to be the western wall of a large rectangular structure. A flimsy wall of stone and mud agglomerate and its associated pierced floor was found.

Finds as bagged

1- Earth and sand clearance layer. Pot inc. local. Bronze bauble.

2- Break in mud floor. Sand to ash and? flagstones. Pot inc. local. Fragment of lamp.

3- Below clearance to west of the wall. Sand to ash layer. Pot inc. local plus glass.

4- Gutting in mud floor to see stratigraphy. Sand to ash layer as 2. Pot. inc. local.

<u>*Conclusion*</u>*: The trench is inconclusive. The flagstones? at the base of 2. may augure*

[sic]   something more relevant to our pursuits.

Bibliography

This is a select bibliography, the aim of which is not to be as long as possible, but to record every item which has been of direct interest in the writing of the thesis, and also every item which has been of indirect but significant value; so that the bibliography as a whole should present a conspectus of what the writer of the thesis has directly drawn upon, and indirectly read, noted, thought about. Items which do not fall into either of these categories are not included.

All sources quoted or precisely referred to are supplied with cue titles here. Each item that appears in a round bracket enclosing a reference inside the main text, or in footnote references, will be found in the bibliography under the cue title used in the body of the thesis, and the alphabetical position of that item will be that of its cue title.

Unpublished sources

Unpublished papers in the Dept of Antiquities in Cyrene, transcribed in full in Appendix 2: Archive data from Ajdabiyah.

Arabic printed sources, primary and general

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