

Ziri Ibn Menad's AL Sunnhaji Palace a testament to the splendour of design in Algeria's Zirian architecture '

[An archaeological architectural reading of the plan]

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• Abstract:

The palace of Ziri Ibn Menad al-Sanhaji in the city of Achir is the most important Islamic palace in history. Its fame has endured from the era of its construction until the present day. Contemporary historians were keen to mention the city in every literary forum of their works, and archaeological researchers were similarly interested in the palace until recently. This was due to its unique architectural features that gathered artistic influences from different eras, which together formed the theories of architecture that every facility of its kind must have to ensure its functional role without losing sight of the aesthetic aspect.

In this paper, we have conducted an architectural reading of the palace of Ziri bin Menad Al-Sanhaji based on historical sources and the archaeological excavation plan by Golven

Keywords:

Ziri Palace, Asher, Design, Zairian architecture, Planner.

الملخص:

يعد قصر زيري بن مناد الصنهاجي بمدينة أشيرواحدا من أهم القصور الإسلامية التي ذاع صيتها في عصره وحتى وقتنا الحالي، إذ اهتم المؤرخون المعاصرون له بذكر المدينة في كل محفل أدبي من أعمالهم، واهتم بالقصر من بعدهم الباحثون الأثريون إلى يوم قريب، وذلك لما يحمله من سمات معمارية فريدة جمعت تأثيرات فنية من عصور مختلفة شكّلت معا نظريات العمارة التي يستوجب على كل منشأة من صنفه أن تتحلّى بها لضمان أداءها الدور الوظيفي دون إغفال الجانب الجمالي لها.

في هذه الورقة البحثية حاولنا أن نقوم بقراءة معمارية لقصر زيري بن مناد الصنهاجي من خلال ما ذكر عنه في المصادر التاريخية ومن خلال مخططه الناجم عن أعمال الحفريات الأثرية التي قام بها جولفين.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

قصر زيري؛ أشير؛ تصميم؛ العمارة الزيرية؛ مخطط

• Introduction

Ziri's palace was an accurate reflection of the personality of its owner, characterised by the highest degree of wisdom, the highest degree of vigilance and the highest degree of readiness. These qualities were present in 'Ziri' since his early childhood, as he played among his peers as a child with a sultan, and were developed throughout his life in this manner. It is evident that the palace and its architectural details convey numerous meanings and values that exemplify durability and meticulous planning. The strong symmetry between the eastern and western sides of the palace, as well as the prestige and grandeur of the structure, are also evident in the Emirate House. Ziri selected a concise design, preceded by intricate details, which reflects the palace's overall architectural style. The palace's intricate network of corridors, isolated rooms, and false doors represents a sophisticated system of hidden fortification. These architectural elements create the impression that one is not in a fortress, and that access to the Sultan is only granted after a thorough examination of one's intentions and movements.

In light of the aforementioned observations, we may pose the following question: What design features characterize the palace of Ziri bin Menad al-Sanhaji, enabling it to meet the various criteria of architectural theory at all levels of construction and art?

We employed a variety of supplementary methods to answer this question, including the historical method to narrate architectural events, the descriptive method to delineate the palace and its architectural characteristics, and the comparative analytical method to evaluate the Ziri Palace in relation to other comparable structures and to examine specific architectural elements and artistic aspects.

1. An overview of the political history of the emergence of the Zayrians and the founding of the city of Achir

The Islamic Maghreb was the site of a series of rapid developments at the beginning of the third century AH (9th century AD), which resulted in significant shifts in the socio-political landscape of the region. While the Fatimids were preparing to move eastward to Egypt, the Umayyads sought to exert control over the region's trade and economic centers in order to feed the markets of Andalusia with precious goods from the Sudan, including gold and a range of other commodities¹.

In the midst of the unfolding events, the figure of Menad ibn Mangoush al-Sanhaji emerged as a prominent figure among his people. He was a sagacious leader, yet he was beholden to the Abbasids and their regional authority, which was represented by the Al-Aghlia state.

¹ Mohamed Tamar, *The Middle Maghreb in the Shadow of the Sunnahja*, vol. 1, Office of University Publications, Algiers, 2010, pp. 21-38.

The year 315 AH marked a pivotal moment in history when the Fatimids, perceiving an imminent threat to their state's existence, revolted and advanced on Maghraoua, which was ruled by Muhammad bin Khazar. They were ultimately victorious, dispersing the ruling forces to the desert and occupying their capital, Tahrt. Concurrently, the figure of Ziri ibn al-Sanhaji emerged on the political scene. Meanwhile, Ziri ibn Menad al-Sanhaji, whose father had counselled him and entrusted him with tasks despite his youth, emerged as a prominent figure. Ziri was the leader of the Banu Menad and one of the most significant Berber princes and kings in Africa. With the Maghrawa, a tribe of Zenata who bordered him to the west in Central Maghrib, he engaged in prolonged warfare. He is regarded as the inaugural Sunnhaji monarch in Central Maghrib and is credited with establishing the state of Al Ziri in that region. Upon learning of his adversaries' intentions, he sought to undermine their authority, but was alerted to their preparations before they could be completed. Consequently, he invaded their territory, inflicting significant casualties and seizing numerous captives and resources, which bolstered his military strength.

This occurred concurrently with the domination of the Fatimid Shiites in Africa, prompting him to align with them and join forces with them in retaliation against his rivals, the Zenata¹. He played a pivotal role in the suppression and eradication of the rebellion led by Abu Yazid. Al-Mansura bestowed upon him "Tihart" and its surrounding territories. Furthermore, he launched multiple incursions into "Zenata" territories following their incitement of Sunnah tribes against him and their subsequent capture of the Maghila fortress, situated between Fez and Meknes. He subsequently overcame them. In response to the uprising of Muhammad Ibn Khazar, he provided assistance, contributing to the suppression of the revolt. His military forces subsequently expanded until he had no more land to conquer. Consequently, the people requested that he establish a town as a base and an impregnable fortress. In 324 AH/935-936 AD, Ziri bin Menad selected the city of Achir as the site for this purpose. During the reign of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz ibn Mansour, he participated in the invasion of the Far Maghreb under the leadership of Jawhar al-Kateeb. Ziri and his army subsequently conquered the city of Fez, following the execution of the famous incident of the stairs by the Fatimid army commander. This event contributed to the spread of his fame throughout Maghrib².

1.1 Achir, The Sanhaja Tribes' First True City

Ziri, resolved to establish the city of Ashir in 324 AH/936 AD, selected its location and proclaimed to his companions, "This is your place of residence" ³. It is evident that this phrase held significant implications for a prominent leader who was well-versed in strategic location and the treachery of adversaries. He recognized the necessity for the city to possess a secure and fortified location to ensure its long-term survival. The area was initially uninhabited and characterized by its numerous surveillance points ⁴. The city was constructed in two stages. Initially, the location was selected and the necessary infrastructure was established. This included the construction of essential facilities such as water sources and storage. The second stage of construction was not completed until Ziri joined Ismail al-Mansur in confronting Abu Yazid and assisting him in suppressing his

¹ Maryam Kassem Tawil, *ibid*, p. 76.

² Rachid Bourouiba, *The Hammadi State, Its History and Civilisation*, Diwan des Printes Universitaires, Algiers, 1977, p. 9.

³ al-Nuwairi, *The End of the Erb in the Arts of Literature*, Tahh: Abdul Majid Tarjini, Dar al-Kutub al-Alamiya, Beirut, Lebanon, p.88.

⁴ Salim Gabriel al-Khoury, *Athar al-Adhar*, 1st edition, Syrian Press, Beirut - Republic of Lebanon, 1875, p. 193.

revolt. During this period, Ziri permitted the construction of palaces, baths, and residential buildings¹. Subsequently, he directed Ziri to procure the most proficient builders, carpenters, and artisans from the cities of Hamza and al-Masila, who were responsible for its construction. Additionally, he dispatched an envoy to the Fatimid caliph al-Qaim, requesting the provision of skilled craftsmen. In response, he was sent an engineer whose expertise was unparalleled in the Maghrib and possessed a comprehensive understanding of urban planning. Moreover, he was furnished with iron and an assortment of construction materials².

Al-Bakri reported that Muhammad ibn Yusuf asserted that Ziri ibn Menad was the architect of the city of Achir. The evidence for this claim is found in the words of Al-Malik ibn Aishun³ :

**O you who ask about our distant lands
The house of vice where the unjust dwell
Founded by the accursed Ziri**

**and of the place of disbelief, Achir's domain
Built for disbelief and falsehood as well
May God's eternal curse be on Ziri**

Translated in Arabic:

وعن محلّ الكفر أشير

يا أيّها السائل عن عزيّنا

قد شيّدت للكفر والزور

عن دار فسق ظالم أهلها

فلعنة الله على زيّري

أسسها الملعون زيّريّها

These verses illustrate the extent of the animosity directed towards Ziri and the magnitude of the hatred for the city itself. This corroborates Ziri's emphasis on the strategic location of the city, yet it is founded upon logical reasoning and a genuine apprehension of the perils that existed prior to its construction.

In the Almanac of Countries, Al-Baghdadi characterizes Achir as a city situated in the Berber Mountains of Maghrib, Africa's southernmost region⁴. Abu al-Fida, on the other hand, depicts it as a formidable fortress, citing its intricate network of challenging pathways, its rugged terrain, and the impossibility of breaching its fortifications⁵.

The city of Achir was accessible via a single point on the eastern side; the remaining sides were characterized by steep rock formations that were impassable. A mere ten men could have effectively deterred an entire army from approaching the city⁶. At the center of the city, two springs, both abundant and deep, provided a vital source of water. Al-Idrisi described it as "a well-fortified

¹ Abdul Rahman ibn Khaldun, op. Cit. p. 204.

² Ibid, p. 88.

³ Al-Bikri, Al-Maslik wa Al-Mamalak, Edition 1, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Alamiyya, p. 241

⁴ Safi al-Din Abd al-Mu'min al-Baghdadi, Marasad al-Iraa'a on the names of places and spots, Dar al-Jeel, Beirut - Republic of Lebanon, 1954, p. 85.

⁵ Imad al-Din Ismail Abu al-Fida, Taqim al-Baladan, Dar al-Sadr, Beirut - Republic of Lebanon, 1995, p. 124.

⁶ Salim Gabriel al-Khoury, Ibid, p. 193.

stronghold with numerous advantages, including a market that flourishes on a designated day, where a vast array of goods is traded." Al-Idrisi described it as "a well-spotted fortress with many benefits that has a market on a well-known day, to which every nice thing is brought and every nice thing is sold." Additionally, some sources indicate that Ashir was constructed on the ruins of an ancient city. This is evidenced by a reference in the book *Al-Istabsar Fi Ajayeb Al Amsar*, which describes Ashir as an ancient city. However, Ziri transformed it into a walled city¹, fortifying it and constructing buildings within it. Near Ashir was a notable structure known as Solomon's Sanctuary. This building was regarded as one of the most impressive and intelligent structures ever constructed, featuring marble, columns, and inscriptions that are difficult to describe in detail. It is a venerable and fortified structure².

2. The Ziri Ibn Menad Palace

2.1 The location of the palace:

From an astronomical perspective, the Palace of Ziri is situated in the city of Achir Ali, with the following geographic coordinates: Its coordinates are **35°56'39.3" N, 3°17'41.5" E**, situated on a hill **1,120** meters above sea level, with a view of El Kef Lakhdar, which is administratively affiliated with the Ain Boucif district in the state of Médéa. The palace is situated 10 km from the city of Sidi Bou Zid and 150 km from the capital city of Algiers. It is located in the most remote area of the historical city of Achir, surrounded by mountains and considered the most fortified location in the region. (See Fig.1)

Fig.1. the Ziri palace situation on a heavily fortified location.



Source : Google Satellite base map, modified in Qgis. ©Google

Accessed on November 16, 2024

¹ Anonymous author, *Al-Istibbasar fi al-'Ajabat al-'Amsar*, Dar al-'Aqsa al-Kultural, Baghdad, Iraq, 1986, p.58.

² Muhammad Abd al-Munim al-Humayri, ed : Ihsan Abbas, *Al-Rawd al-Moatar fi Khabar al-Aqtar*, A Gazetteer, 2nd edition, Bibliothéque du Liban, Beirut - Republic of Lebanon, 1985, p. 60.

2.2 Historiographical Approaches to the City of Achir and the Ziri Palace:

Archaeological research in the city of Achir and palace of Ziri commenced in the mid-nineteenth century, following the observation by numerous travellers of the presence of hitherto unknown ruins in the area. This prompted the researcher De Slan to undertake an investigation, which included the translation of a chapter from the book *Al-Nuwairi Nihayat al- 'Erb fi Funun al-Adab of*. It became increasingly evident that these ruins belonged to the city of Achir, which had been referenced in various literary sources, Berbrugger subsequently visited the site on two occasions: the first time in July 1850 and the second in August 1852. He conducted a comprehensive archaeological survey of the area. In 1869, Chabassier undertook a comprehensive archaeological survey of the area. However, no actual excavations were conducted at the site until 1908 AD, when Rodier initiated the first one and was able to discern the existence of sections of the city containing significant sites, which were subsequently designated as “Bint al-Sultan” Park, Ashir, and Al-Bina.¹

2.3 The Ziri Palace: Architecture and Symmetry

The palace of Ziri ibn Menad exhibited a remarkable diversity and complexity, reflecting the gradation of functions within its various spaces. These included corridors, rooms, and the four courtyards, which were arranged symmetrically on either side of the palace. This constituted a coherent system that served to reinforce the overarching aesthetic of the palace. If the four sides of the palace had not been symmetrical and similar according to the intersecting axes of the general plan, the overall form of the palace would have resulted in a lack of coherence, a distortion of its overall structure, and a stagnation of its aesthetic appeal.

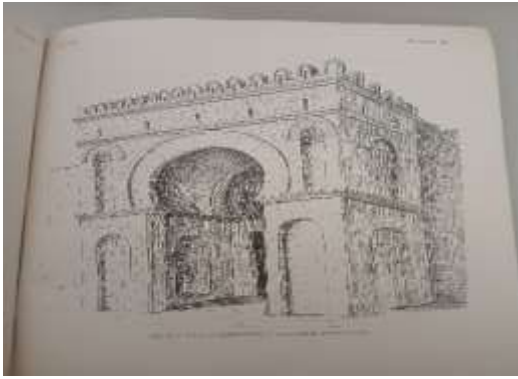
The palace also exemplifies the early Fatimid architectural style, as evidenced by the distinct architectural features of the Fatimid architect who was commissioned by the Fatimid Caliph al-Qaim Amr Allah to contribute to the construction of the city of Ashir and its palace. The architectural elements of the Ziri Palace are nearly identical to those of other Fatimid architectural symbols from the same period in Africa, as evidenced by various historical sources and reliable evidence². The architectural elements of Ziri's palace are nearly identical to those of Fatimid architecture from the same period in Africa. This is exemplified by the prominent main entrance of Ziri's palace, which is almost identical to the main entrance of the Great Mosque in Mahdia. It is also noteworthy that the remains of the palace of Abu al-Qasim, (See **Fig.4**) which exhibit characteristics indicative of tenth-century AD building techniques, were excavated in the city of Mahdia. The entrance of the palace was identified and remodeled. A comparison of the entrance of Ziri Palace with that of the other palace revealed a striking similarity, verging on complete identity. This finding lends support to the view that the two palaces were constructed by the same individual, who was regarded as the most skilled builder in Africa.³. (See **Fig 2.3**).

¹ L. Golvin, *Le Palais de Zīrī à Achīr* (Dixième Siècle J. C.), *Ars Orientalis*, 1966, Vol. 6 (1966), pp. 56-57.

² L. Golvin, *Ars Orientalis*, 1966, Vol. 6 (1966), pp. 56-57.

³ Grabar, Oleg, editor. *Muqarnas Volume III: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985.p 22

Fig.2. Main Entrance of Mahdia



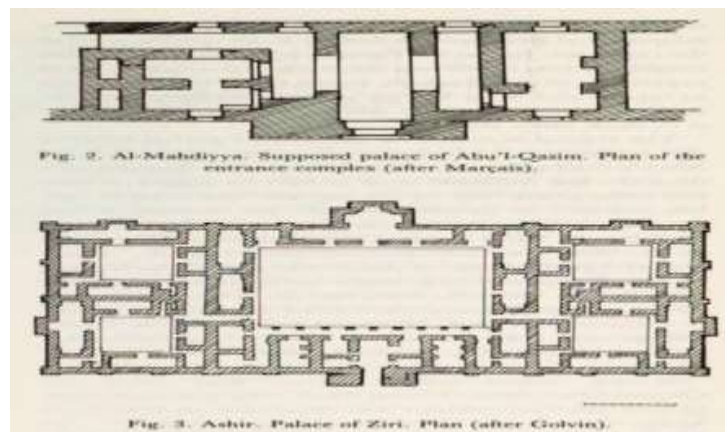
Source : L. Golvin, *Le Palais de Zīrī à Achīr (Dixième Siècle J. C.)*, Ars ,1966. p

Fig.3. General projection of the main entrance to the Ziri Palace



Source: Lamia HADDA. *Zirid and Hammadid palaces in North Africa and Sicily*, 2018 p327.

Fig.4. Comparison of the entrances of the two palaces of Abulkasem in Mahdia and Ziri in Asheer on



Source: Grabar, *An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture*, 1985.p 22

The early Fatimid architectural style was a synthesis of elements from both Eastern and Western traditions, shaped by the architectural legacies of ancient Egypt, Byzantium, and the Abbasid Caliphate. The most notable examples of this style can be found in the magnificent palaces that were constructed during this period. The Fatimid style also inherited the artistic traditions of sculpture from the Umayyad and Abbasid styles, as evidenced by the discovery of examples in areas where Fatimid influence was prevalent, including North Africa, the Levant, and the island of Sicily¹.

The general morphological appearance of the palace of Ziri Ben Menad is a tradition deeply rooted in the roots of civilization. Upon observation of its external form, it becomes evident that the structure is comprised of a perimeter wall built to a high degree of construction, supported by external niches and a single door to access it. These arrangements indicate the security readiness to

¹ Ahmed Abdel Razzaq Ahmed, *Islamic arts until the end of the Fatimid era*, 2nd edition, Dar al-Hariri for Printing, Cairo, Egypt, 2006, p. 76.

receive symbols of order or distinguished persons. This type of orientation first appeared during the dynastic era in Mesopotamian civilization and continued successively through the succession of civilizations. The tradition continued until the advent of the Islamic era, particularly during the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates. During this period, the traditions of palace construction were preserved and subsequently transferred to the Maghreb. These palaces exhibited the same architectural features but included technical additions related to Sharia control. The varying environmental and climatic conditions influenced the choice of building materials and techniques, but the underlying principles of security arrangements in Islamic palace construction remained intact¹.

The Ziri Palace's exterior is notable for its durability and geometrical reinforcement, which serve to fulfill both functional and symbolic roles. The perimeter wall, which extends for a length of 72 meters and a width of 40 meters, is distinguished by its rectangular projection. The wall is supported by square corner posts and similar posts along the wall on all four sides. The shape of the wall reflects the isolation of the interior and exterior of the palace, thereby providing additional privacy to the building².

The concept of order in architectural design encompasses not only geometric regularity but also a state in which each component of the building or facility is precisely organized in relation to the other components. This organization is intended to produce a harmonious system³.

2.4 The interior design of the palace:

The Ziri Palace is comprised of a primary entranceway that leads to a corridor intersecting with two antechambers. One of these antechambers may have been designated for male occupants, while the other may have been utilized as living quarters and rooms for the palace guards. Access to the interior of the palace is only possible by proceeding forward and turning right or left into one of two small covered courtyards. These courtyards lead to the northern facade of the main courtyard, which is preceded by a corridor with two rooms on either side, each with doors leading to the main central courtyard.

On the opposite side of the entrance is the princely throne hall or reception hall, in which Prince Ziri receives various delegations. This reception hall is projected in the shape of an inverted 'T'. This model of the reception hall was repeated later in the Al-Mu'tasim Palace in Almiria 433 AH - 1041 AD. And in Castillo palace The palace did not deviate from the architectural norms observed in other Islamic edifices in the Levant, particularly those belonging to the Umayyad

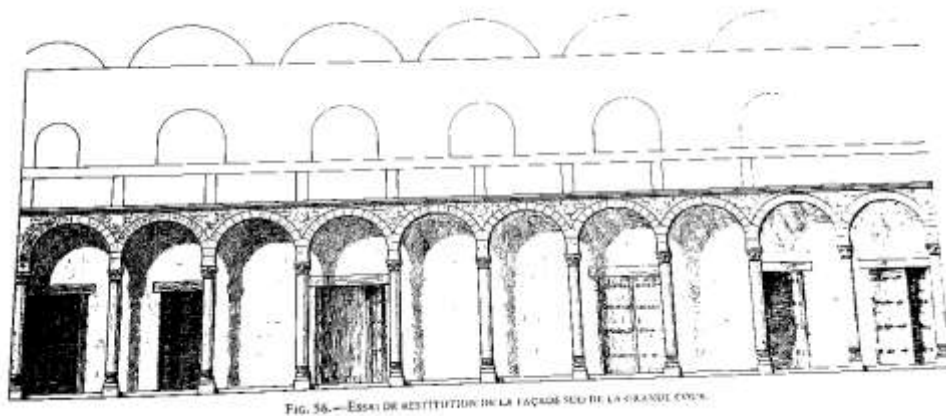
¹ Raed Salem Ahmed Al-Numan, Characteristics of the spatial organisation of Islamic palace buildings, a comparative study of the characteristics of the spatial organisation of palace buildings in Islamic architecture, Mesopotamian architecture and the architecture of neighbouring countries, **Al-Manara Consulting Magazine**, No. 17, 2009, p. 98.

² Kabilla Fares Al-Maliki's tribe, History of Architecture through the Ages, Dar Al-Manajah for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, Jordan, 2011, pp.183-184.

³ Francis D.K. Ching, Architecture Form, Space, & Order Third Edition, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2007, p 338.

dynasty. The Mashta Palace, constructed in the early second century AH¹, exemplifies this similarity in the rectangular projection of the palace, which is regarded as a significant influence of Byzantine architectural styles on Fatimid architecture. This influence can be traced back to the Zirian architectural style in its nascent stages. One such example is the Ziri bin Menad Palace, which later evolved into a unique model. The reception room is preceded by an antechamber with three entrances, situated midway along the wall and parallel to the northern facade of the central courtyard. The main nave of the palace is lined with a group of columns decorated with capitals on the facades. There are eleven columns on each side, topped with semicircular arches of homogeneous dimensions. These arches are similar to those seen in the Fatimid arches in the Mahdia Mosque and its palaces, and they are almost identical in design. (see Figure 03).

Fig.5. An imaginary drawing of one of the facades of the central courtyard based on the results of the archaeological excavation at the site



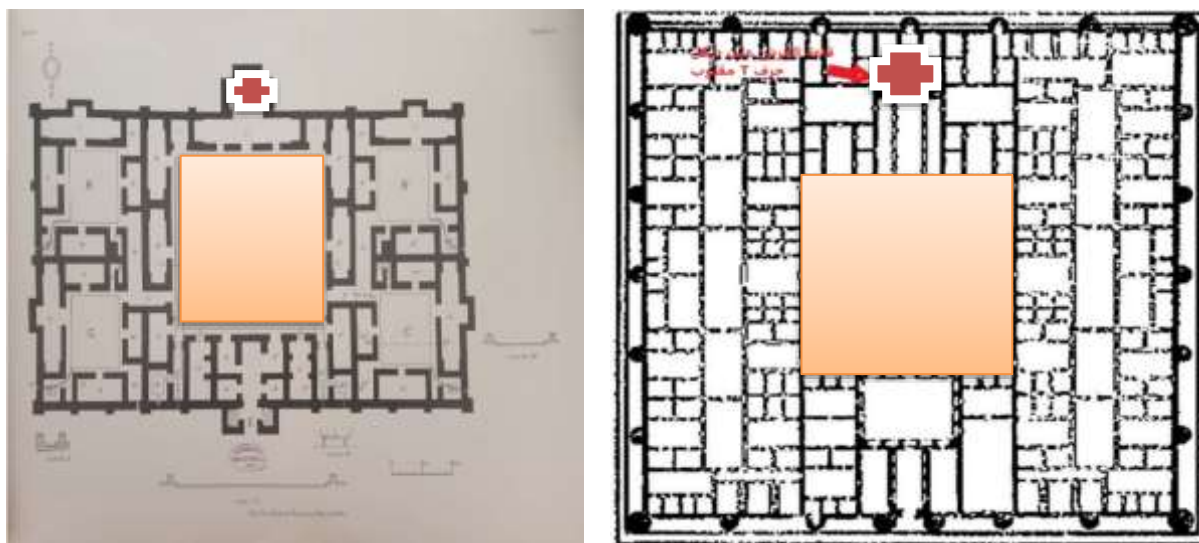
Source : L. Golvin, Le Palais de Zīrī à Achīr (Dixième Siècle J. C.), Ars ,1966. P 23.

The central courtyard represents the open courtyard in architectural structures, which is typically square or rectangular in shape and surrounded by other buildings. The courtyard provides air and light to the surrounding structures².(See Fig 04-05).

¹ Abdul Aziz Hamid, Majlis and Reception Halls in Islamic Palaces until the Second Century AH, Al-Mawred Journal for Research and Studies, no: 04, October 2005, p. 12.

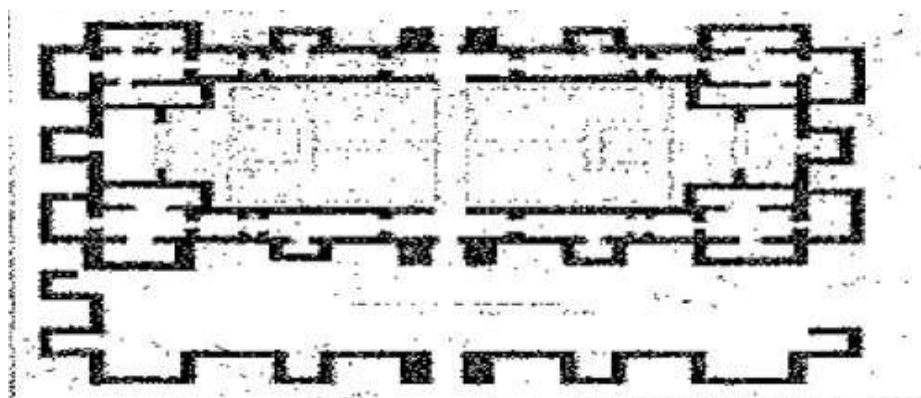
² Mahmoud Zain al-Abidin, Spaces of Islamic Architecture, Selected Essays, no edition, Aleppo, Syria, 1932, p. 114

Fig.6.7. Plan of the Umayyad Mashta Palace, where the central courtyard centres the palace and the throne hall is positioned in the same position as the reception hall in the Ziri Palace



Source: Abdul Aziz Hamid, *Majlis and Reception Halls in Islamic Palaces until the Second Century AH*, 2005, p 14.

Fig.8.: (.05.) Plan of the Castillo Palace

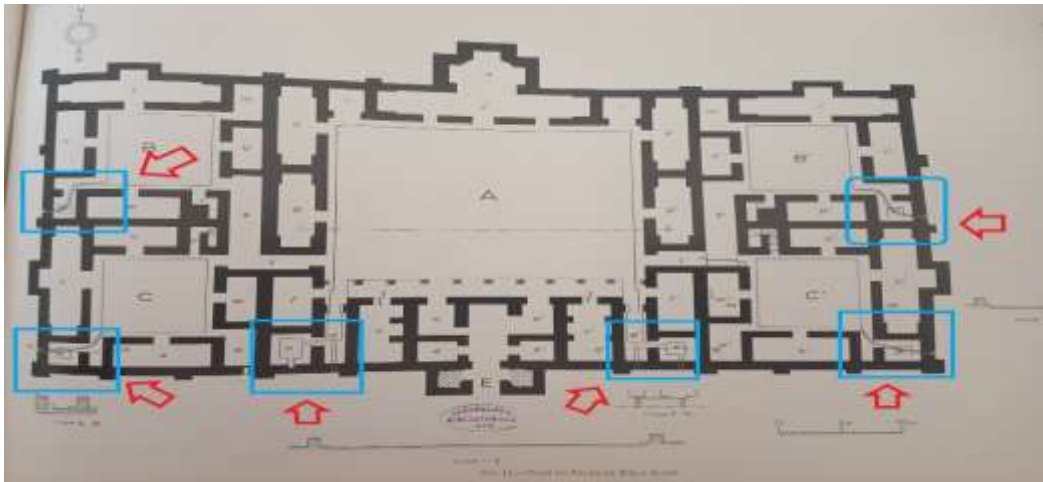


Source: Basilion Pabon Maldonado, *Islamic Palaces of Andalusia*, 2010, p. 82.

The palace's central courtyard is surrounded by four courtyards, which in turn are flanked by two residential complexes. These complexes are remarkably symmetrical, with every architectural element identical on either side. This symmetry reflects the meticulous attention to detail that went into the palace's design. To protect the palace from flooding with rainwater, a drainage network was provided. This network originates from the secondary courtyards and the central courtyard, traversing the interstitial walls through

grooves that were specifically created for this purpose. It then extends beneath the wall, ultimately discharging outside the palace on both sides for the secondary courtyards and on the south wall for the main courtyard¹, (see Figure 07).

Fig.9.: (.05.) Distribution of rainwater drainage networks in palace of Zeri/Adapted



Source : L. Golvin, Le Palais de Zīrī à Achīr (Dixième Siècle J. C.), Ars ,1966. P 23.

In accordance with the archaeological excavation of the palace site, conducted and studied by Golvin and Lisen², the palace's morphological appearance may be perceived as fortified due to the apparent presence of supporting structures, which resemble towers. In this regard, we recall the supports that surround the Al-Akhaydir Palace in Iraq (the history of the palace), which gives the impression that the palace is a military fortress. However, the evidence suggests that it was in fact a palace prepared specifically to receive a prominent figure for the purpose of fortification and for security reasons that may have occurred at the time of its construction. The palace is a military fortress, but the truth is that it is a palace specially prepared to receive a prominent figure for the purpose of fortification and for security reasons that occurred at the time of its construction. This is evidenced by the palace of Ziri and the positioning of the remains of the foundations of the walls that remained intact, which can be technically supported by studying. The utilization of the primary walls within the palace, as a logical methodology in the theoretical frameworks of design, entails the employment of the vertical wall as a structural component within the load-bearing wall system.

¹ L. Golvin, Le Palais de Zīrī à Achīr (Dixième Siècle J. C.), Ibid, pp 47-76.

² Basilion Papon Maldonado, tr: Ali Ibrahim Al-Manoufi, Islamic Architecture in Andalusia - Palace Architecture, Twelfth Century Almohads and Almoravids, Volume 02, Volume 1, General Authority of Dar Al-Kutub and National Documents, Cairo, Egypt, 2010, p. 22.

However, when these vertical walls are organized in parallel groups to serve as carrying surfaces, this results in the formation of multiple angles that converge in a single point, thereby fulfilling the intended function¹.

In the plan of Qasr Zeri, it was observed that there was a considerable number of angles and that they were in close proximity as a result of the merging of the main walls with the secondary walls emanating from them, in the four sections of the palace. This suggests that these walls were responsible for supporting not only the weight of the roofs of the dwellings, but also the weight of the walls above them, which would have been the floor or higher floors. Consequently, it seems highly probable that the palace consisted of at least two floors, although this remains to be confirmed through further archaeological excavations or applied works on the site of the palace.

The internal layout of Qasr Zeri is also distinguished by a striking degree of geometric regularity, evident in the positioning of its secondary courtyards and spaces, the geometry of the lines, and the sharpness and rigidity of the angles. When associated with a building, these architectural features serve as a clear expression of strength and rigidity in controlling matters².

It is evident that Fatimid architectural influence is discernible in this regard, a conclusion supported by the sources indicating that the Fatimid Caliph al-Qaim dispatched his most proficient architects, Ziri bin Menad, to assist Ziri bin Manad. There is substantial evidence indicating that al-Qaim played a direct role in the planning of the palace and exercised oversight during its construction. The triangular division is a defining feature of Fatimid architecture, evident in both civil and religious structures³.

In light of the numerous allusions that support the assertion that the city of Achir was part of the Fatimid caliphate, we contend that the relationship between them was merely a matter of political flattery and support, with the guarantee of complete independence. It can be argued that the Fatimid assistance to Ziri bin Menad in planning the city of Achir and its palaces was, in fact, purely technical in nature. This would have entailed the dispatch of individuals versed in the arts of construction and engineering to instruct the builders who had arrived from Burj Hamza, Msila, and other nearby cities. If the new city of Achir had been a political extension of the Fatimid state, it would have been subject to more penetrating dictates in the details of this city, even up to the choice of names for its various components (listing the components of the city from the palace and places). This is evidenced by the fact that when the caliphate and the center of the Fatimid state moved to Egypt, many details were copied from Mahdia, the former capital of the caliphate. This

¹ Francis Cheng, tr: Ahmed Al-Khatib, *Architecture - Mass, Space and Order*, Anglo-Egyptian Library, Cairo, Egypt, 2013, p. 40.

² Francis Cheng, *Ibid*, p. 183.

³ Mohamed Abdel Sattar Osman, *Fatimid Architecture - Military - Civil - Religious*, 1st edition, Dar al-Qahira for Publishing, Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt, 2006, p. 263.

includes the names of architectural elements such as Bab Zouila and Bab This suggests that Ashir was a city that constituted the foundation ¹.

He traced these controls through his study of the House of the King and its roles in the Abbasid era, employing the latter as a model. The Fatimids sought to establish a new state and capital based on the concept of a "nation," cognizant that this state would become autonomous as they relocated to Egypt. Ziri, who exhibited clear leadership traits from an early age, felt empowered to make decisions for himself, his army, and his people upon founding Asheer. The state was constructed upon three fundamental elements: the subjects, territory, and authority. In contrast, the nation emphasized cultural unity, a concept that did not necessitate the existence of a shared language or sect. The Fatimid imams permitted Asheer to enjoy a certain degree of autonomy, but the return of the Zayrians to the Abbasid fold gave rise to concerns, demonstrating the interconnection between politics and architecture. This relationship is exemplified by architectural details that have endured over time. These architectural features later persisted in the Bani Hammad castle and spread to Sicily. Golvin posits that Norman Sicilian architecture is more closely aligned with Zirid styles, whereas Hogg asserts that it is more akin to Ashir's architectural traditions.

The Castillejoa Palace bears a striking resemblance to the Palace of Ziri, exhibiting a striking similarity in design, shape, and fine details. Additionally, both palaces were constructed within a similar setting, with the Castillejoa Palace situated on a lower hilltop² surrounded by a wall with prominent towers. It is probable that the palace dates from the period when Murcia was at the height of its importance during the reign of "Muhammad ibn Mardanish" (1147 AD-1172 AD). It is believed to be the palace of Ibn Saad mentioned in Arab sources and is thought to be the palace of Ibn Saad.

The palace, which now survives only in the form of its foundations, was rectangular in shape and measured 61 by 38 meters. The structure featured projecting quadruple towers at each end and was accessed via a northeast gateway, which was flanked by two smaller towers. On the southwest side, towers of a similar design supported a balcony. A second retaining wall, situated approximately 14 meters below the initial structure, was erected to provide additional support for the underlying foundations. The palace rooms were arranged in a radial configuration around a central courtyard garden, which measured 33 by 18 meters. The paved corridors surrounding the courtyard exhibited a differential elevation, forming quadrants with levels descending 1.4 meters below the central corridor. At the intersection of the corridors was a fountain, connected to ponds at each end of the courtyard by aqueducts. As Torres Balbas proposed, it is conceivable that the courtyard was circumscribed by a portico with projecting pavilions at either end. These structures may have served as prototypes for the Alhambra's courtyard pavilions or as mere extensions of the paved walkway, akin to the garden at Madinat al-Zahra. The palace was supplied with water through fountains, and remnants of the pipes and canals that conveyed the water are still visible.³

¹ See: Al-Marudi, *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniya wa al-Wilayat al-Diniyya*, ed: Ahmad Mubarak al-Baghdadi, 1st edition, Dar Ibn Qutaiba Library, Kuwait, 1989

² A vassal of Alfonso VII, called Rey Lobo by the Christians and possibly his property

³ Ruggles, D. Fairchild. *Gardens, Landscape, and Vision in the Palaces of Islamic Spain*. University Park : Penn State University Press, 2000.p 22

The design of the Ziri Palace was replicated in several different regions, where designers were inspired by the general form that serves a functional purpose while maintaining simplicity in form. One such example is the "Laziza" Palace, constructed by the Norman King Roger II between 1154 and 1156 AD. This is the most complete surviving example of a garden pavilion built by Muslim craftsmen on the Fatimid model. It represents the most complete example of a garden pavilion erected by Muslim artisans in accordance with the Fatimid architectural style. Its design is analogous to that of the Zirid throne room, augmented by the incorporation of a striking water feature: the Shadrwan or Salsabil, a sloped panel on the wall through which water flows into a channel and subsequently collects in a central fountain¹.

3. The artistic aspects of Ziri's palace:

While the artistic aspect of the city of Ashir and Prince Ziri's palace is regarded as the weakest, there is nevertheless evidence that can be used to conceptualize the palace from an aesthetic standpoint. The available evidence indicates that the palace was not merely a stone structure. Excavations conducted by Golvin revealed the presence of numerous decorative and artistic elements. The palace is associated with both artistic and architectural elements, including a multitude of pots from the same period. It is postulated that the artistic contents of Ziri's palace were transferred for use in constructing the lost palace of Belkin ibn Ziri, which would explain the absence of artistic monuments at Ziri's palace. This theory, first proposed by Golvin², who undertook extensive travel through the Maghrib and studied a number of palaces, is supported by his observation of the Sedrata Palace, which exhibited artistic embellishments similar to those of Ziri's era.

3.1. Columns and Capitals

The columns situated within the palace grounds were adorned with capitals, which served to distinguish them from the arches that surmounted them. Golvin discovered three relatively simple capitals bearing a floral decoration comprising two smooth acanthus leaves suspended from a smooth body, crafted on a limestone block measuring 0.19 m in width and 0.12 m in height. Additionally, a fourth crown was discovered, exhibiting slight variations from the preceding examples. The leaves are more pronounced, and the crown's body is incised with vertical lines that terminate before reaching the crown's neck. This design bears resemblance to the muqarnas, a type of ornamental decoration that became prevalent in later periods. It is plausible that this style served as an anticipatory prototype for its subsequent manifestation. Its existence was not confined to this site; it was also documented in Kairouan and Shubra al-Mansuriyyah³. (See Figure 10.11.12).

¹ Palaces, Houses, and Halls types between the 9th and 12th Century, <https://web.mit.edu/4.611/www/L7.htm>

² L. Golvin, *Le Palais de Zīrī à Achīr* (Dixième Siècle J. C.), Ibid, pp,70-73.

³ Ibid, pp.72-75

Fig.10. The base and body of the column at Ashir Palace



Source :

<https://archiqoo.com/locations/achir.php>

Fig.11.12 The crowns of the Ziri Palace in Ashir



Source : L. Golvin, *Le Palais de Zīrī à Achīr (Dixième Siècle J. C.)*, Ars ,1966. P 18

Decorations and inscriptions:

In the Palace of Ziri, a number of stucco artifacts were discovered, including a 137mm square piece featuring a combination of geometric motifs and sharply angled, leafy Kufic script, interspersed with slotted letter circles. Additionally, a horned zellige-like decoration with a blend of geometric and floral motifs, as well as a mixed geometric and floral decoration, were also unearthed. (See **Figure. 13.14.**)

.3.2 Sculpture:

It is imperative that we discuss the intriguing artifact discovered by Golven during the palace excavation. This artifact is a carved plaster piece that depicts an animal formation comprising heads with small ears. It is unclear whether the artist intended to portray the heads of lions or cats; however, the artistic personification of animals is noteworthy, as it contravenes the values espoused by Islam. Nevertheless, the strong influences of Sassanid and Persian art in the region must be acknowledged. The exception to this is the strong influence of Sassanid and Persian art on the region, which subsequently influenced the architecture of this part of the Islamic world at the time.

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¹ L. Golvin, *Le Palais de Zīrī à Achīr (Dixième Siècle J. C.)*, Ibid, pp.72-75

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Fig.13. The crowns of the Ziri Palace in Ashir



Source : L. Golvin, Le Palais de Zīrī à Achîr (Dixième Siècle J. C.), Ars ,1966. P 18

Fig.14. The crowns of the Ziri Palace in Ashir



Source : L. Golvin, Le Palais de Zīrī à Achîr (Dixième Siècle J. C.), Ars ,1966. P 18

Fig.15. An imaginative drawing that simulates an artistic plaster sculpture depicting animal figures - palace of Ziri



Source : L. Golvin, Le Palais de Zīrī à Achîr (Dixième Siècle J. C.), Ars ,1966. P 22

Fig.16. Artistic plaster sculpture depicting animal figures – palace of Ziri

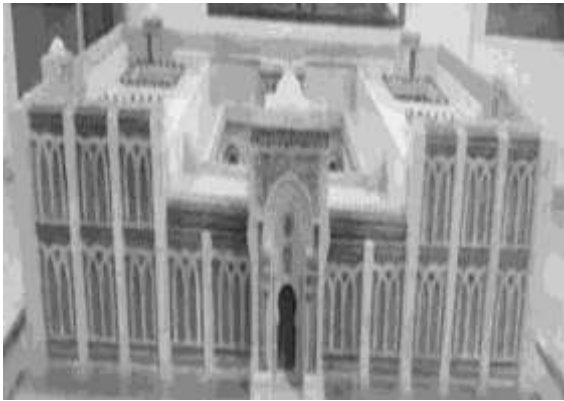


Source : L. Golvin, Le Palais de Zīrī à Achîr (Dixième Siècle J. C.), Ars ,1966. P 22

3.3Decorating the facade of the palace:

The walls of the palace façade were covered with a layer of white stucco and decorated with crossed arches. A model of this decoration was found on the palace site, allowing for the visualisation of the palace's external appearance. It is known that this technique was previously used in Mahdia's palaces. See **Fig.11 & Picture .6**

Fig.17. A reimagined model of the palace façade



Source: National Museum of Archaeology - Algeria

Fig.18. Crossbow motifs on stucco



Source : L. Golvin, Le Palais de Zīrī à Achîr (Dixième Siècle J. C.), Ars ,1966. P 22

• Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that Ziri's palace is regarded as an exemplar of Zirid architectural style at its inception. It was able to incorporate architectural influences that were available at the time of its construction, including the Fatimid style, which was the most proximate and logical choice, given that Ziri and his people were constructing a specific spatial framework for their occupation and use as a stable base after they had resided in the mountains for an extended period. Subsequently, it evolved into the capital of a state that ruled for centuries. Consequently, Ziri's pragmatic approach to resource management and willingness to adopt architectural dictates or utilize techniques to complete the city of Ashir and the palace under investigation exemplifies his strategic thinking. Additionally, we observed the contrasting approach of the Fatimids, who assisted the Zirids in establishing a formidable city and furnished it with various resources, materials, and skilled laborers, despite anticipating its eventual separation from them. We elucidated this phenomenon through the lens of subsequent developments in the conceptualization of the nation-state, as exemplified by the concepts of the Caliphate and the Wilayat during that era.

As has been demonstrated, the Palace of Ziri was not an architectural creation of the builders; rather, it represented an architectural pattern that originated in the ancient era of architecture in the ancient world and was subsequently employed by the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates. In each case, the model was adapted to incorporate a distinctive feature or characteristic, thereby facilitating the transfer of these influences and features to buildings erected at different times and in disparate locations throughout Islamic history. This is exemplified by the island of Cyprus and the city of Córdoba in Andalusia. The majority of scholars engaged in the study of Islamic architecture, particularly in the context of palace architecture, readily cite the Ziri Palace as a case study due to its status as a representative example of such structures. Consequently, it serves as a conduit for the transmission of diverse architectural theories that have persisted over an extended period.

Finally, the following conclusions can be drawn from this research:

- The sources on the construction of the city of Achir, especially in Ibn Khaldun's introduction, can be re-read as having been built in two different phases with little difference in time.
- The construction of Achir Palace or Ziri Palace marked the beginning of a new history for the Middle Maghreb and paved the way for its independence from the various powers that ruled the region, such as the Abbasid and Fatimid caliphates, as it represented the centre of a new power that later became a powerful state that controlled most of the Islamic Maghreb.
- By linking architecture, politics and history, Qasr Zeri has combined several architectural influences that extend back to the ancient period by incorporating architectural features found from the Assyrian era in the ancient civilisation of Iraq and some features of ancient Egyptian palaces to the Islamic periods during the Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid caliphates, indicating architectural necessities with a special symbolism of the Fatimid influence through the participation of the chief architect of the Fatimid state in the construction.

- These architectural influences continued to appear in many similar palaces in the later period in which the palace lived as a centre of power in different parts of its cultural neighbourhood, such as the imitation of some features in the palaces of "Laziza" and "Castillejoa", some palaces in Granada in Andalusia, which means that Ziri Palace became a centre of architectural transformation and influence in other areas after attracting special influences in the design aspect.
- According to some of the sources relied upon in this paper, the site of the city of Achir and the Palace of Zeri was a former civilisation station containing an ancient city and an important facility, and it is necessary to reconstruct the perception of these references and confirm their seriousness through more in-depth research.
- Some sources suggest that there may have been a second palace or other palaces on the site of the Zeri city of Achir, especially the palace of Bouloghine Ben Zeri, to which it has been suggested that the contents of the Zeri palace were transferred.
- The site of the city of Achir in general and the site of the palace are still full of many secrets that require an archaeological excavation to evaluate the data available thanks to the efforts of researchers since the previous century, especially with the availability of the technical framework of the Algerian University to carry out these field works professionally.

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