

# The Aghlabids and Their Neighbors

*Art and Material Culture in Ninth-Century North  
Africa*

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## Jerba of the Ninth Century: Under Aghlabid Control?

*Renata Holod and Tarek Kahlaoui*

With the beginning of the ninth century, the (Sunni) Aghlabid dynasty was particularly active in establishing a line of the forts (*ribāts*) along the coast of Ifriqiya. For the Gulf of Gabès region, their chief *ribāṭ* was located at Gabès (Qabis) on the mainland. A detailed study of settlement patterns on the island of Jerba suggests that at the same time at least three strongholds were operating on the island throughout this century. Only one could, perhaps, be directly connected to these Aghlabid initiatives for attack and defense along the seaboard. The increasing Ibadi influx into the territory of Jerba throughout the ninth century would indicate that, while the Aghlabid frontier may have reached Jerba, it never became fully rooted there. This chapter presents the reconstructable settlement patterns of the eighth through tenth centuries on the island, which are based on evidence developed from archaeological survey data. These are juxtaposed with available information gleaned from scanty historical notices.

### Studying the Island Space

The nature of the settlement on Jerba during the time that the Aghlabid dynasty controlled the coast and hinterland of Ifriqiya has become more understandable mainly thanks to the results of an archaeological survey of the island. This survey took place in five seasons, 1996–2000, and mapped all phases of occupation from prehistoric through to the end of nominal Ottoman control over the island in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The survey was carried out

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1 For full results of the survey, see Fentress, Drine, and Holod, *Jerba Studies*, vol. 1 and Holod, Fentress, and Drine, *Jerba Studies*, vol. 2. The survey was a joint Tunisian–American project. It was supported by the University of Pennsylvania (University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the History of Art Department, and the University Research Foundation), the American Academy in Rome, and the Institut du Patrimoine (INP), Tunis. Additional support was granted by the 1984 Foundation, and by Fondation Van Berchem, Geneva. Supplemental student travel support was provided by the Aga Khan Program in

primarily as a stratified random sampling over the territory of the entire island. Additionally, purposive sampling focused on a microsurvey of the southeastern zone as well as on a sampling investigation along a putative road running from the southwestern tip of the island to its center (Map 22.1).

The mapping and data gathering recorded and analyzed more than 400 sites of all periods. These activities were further supported by a series of test trenches at sites of different periods.<sup>2</sup> The results, then, allow for a consideration of the longue durée settlement history of a place: the island of Jerba.

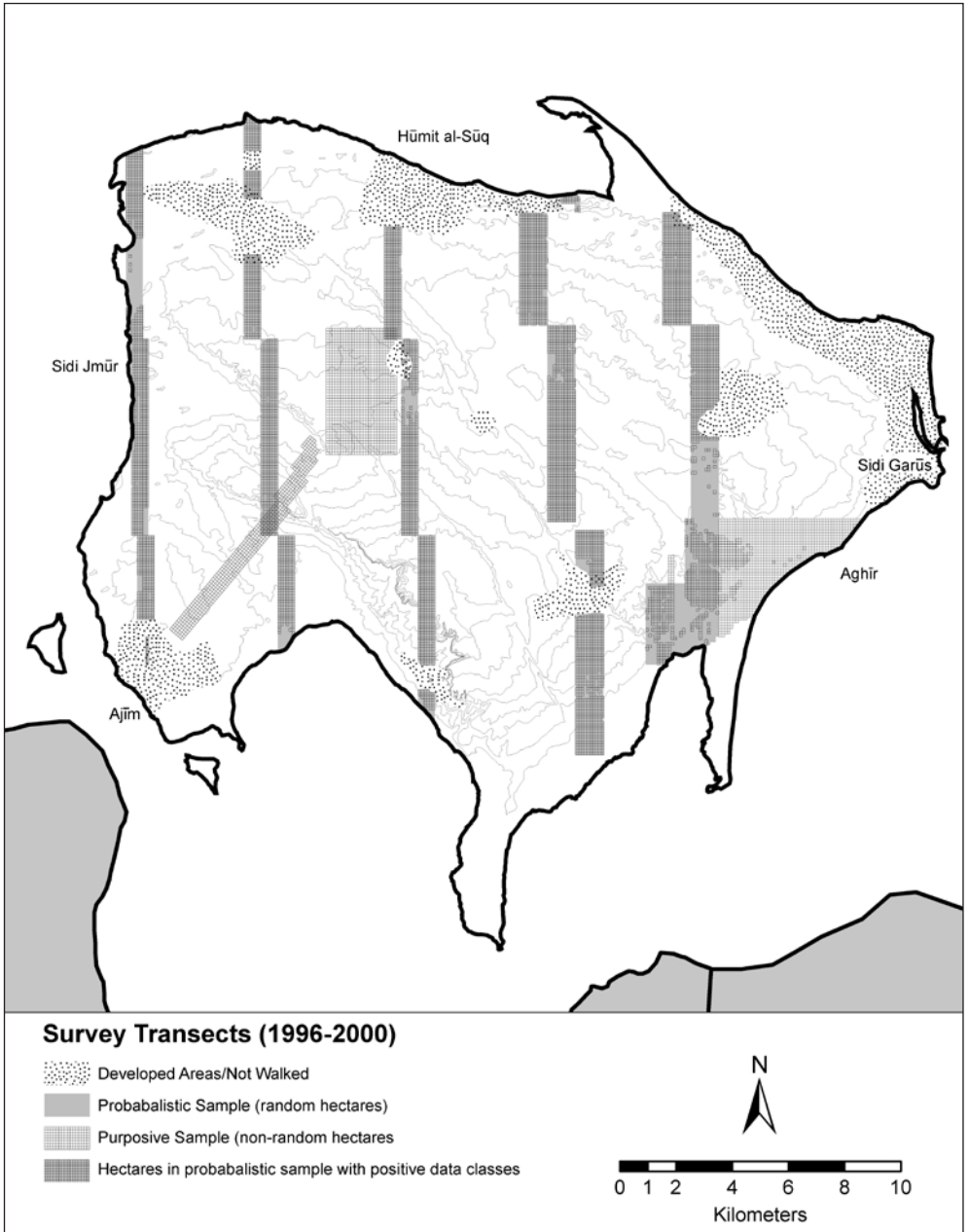
It should be noted that the dating of any one site during this project was first and foremost established by available ceramic chrono-typologies. While these have been very much refined for the earlier (Hellenistic, Roman, and Late Antique) periods in North Africa (and in the Mediterranean as a whole), the medieval and modern ceramic sequences for the same areas have not been as precisely dated and localized. Thus, our dating of sites for periods after 700 CE had to be sorted within rather larger periods than would have been ideal (Table 22.1).

TABLE 22.1 *Sites recorded from the probabilistic survey from all periods*

Period	Sites
Classical (C) (700–350 BCE)	15
Early Hellenistic (EH) (350–230 BCE)	79
Hellenistic (H) (230–30 BCE)	148
Early Roman (ER) (30 BCE–100 CE)	186
Middle Roman (MR) (100–250 CE)	155
Late Antique 1 (LA1) (250–500 CE)	126
Late Antique 2 (LA2) (500–700 CE)	85
Early Medieval (EM) (700–1050 CE)	98
Middle Medieval (MM) (1050–1300 CE)	137
Late Medieval (LM) (1300–1500 CE)	119
Modern 1 (Mod 1) (1500–1700 CE)	130
Modern 2 (Mod 2) (1700–1900 CE)	90

Islamic Architecture at Harvard University and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and by the Art and Archaeology of the Mediterranean World Graduate Group at the University of Pennsylvania. Additional support came from Mrs. Merle Smith.

2 On the methodology of the survey, see Fentress, Frachetti, and Brown, “Methodology.”



MAP 22.1 *Probabilistic and purposive survey of Jerba.*  
MAP: M. FRACHETTI.



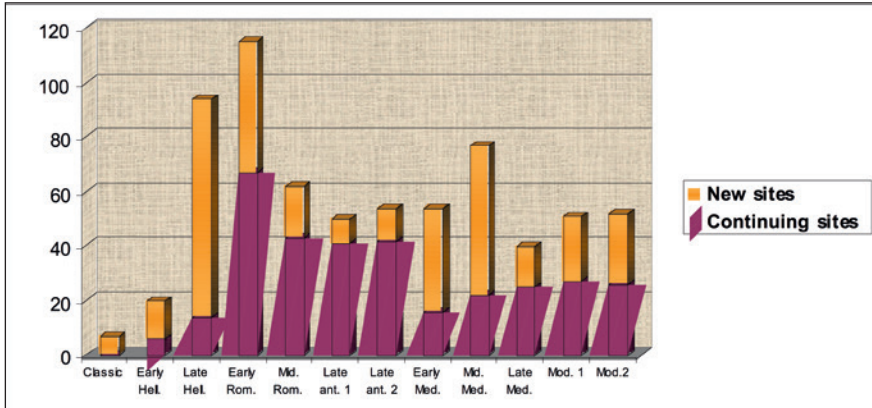


FIGURE 22.1 *New and continuing sites from the probabilistic survey.*

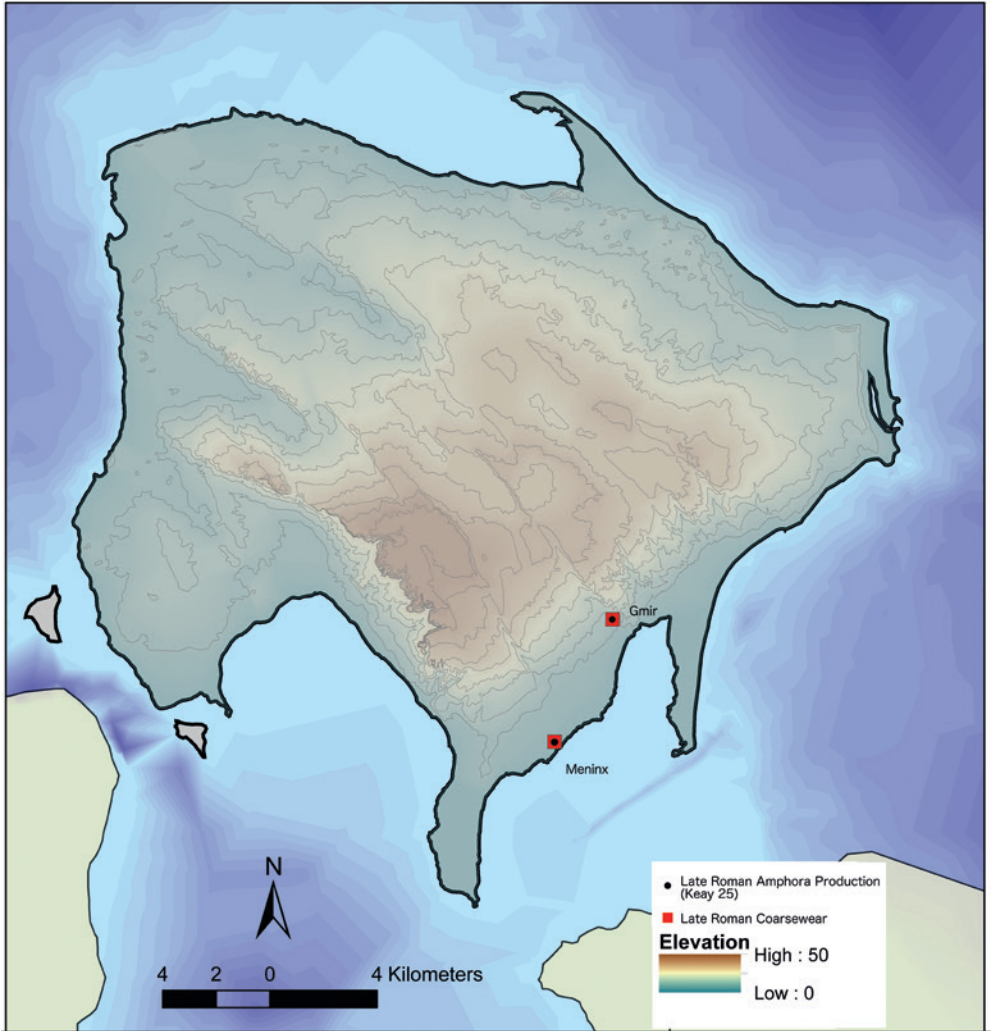
Analysis for new and continuing sites (Fig. 22.1) showed a marked change: while a similar number of sites was recorded for LA2 (500–700 CE) and EM (700–1050 CE), there was considerable diminution of continuing sites and the noticeable appearance of new sites within this temporal horizon.

Jerba was a producer of its own ceramics throughout all periods. Imported ceramics, both vessels and containers, were more commonly found, and used, on the island in the earlier periods, particularly the ARS (African red slip ware) series (Map 22.2).<sup>3</sup> The survey was able to identify several kiln locations, with the later ones located mainly along the southern zone of the island (Map 22.3).

Jerban ceramic typologies were, on the whole, not as receptive to stylistic and technical changes or innovations as other kiln locations on the mainland seem to have been. This holds especially true for the medieval and modern periods. Production centers on the mainland during Aghlabid times, for example, take up new glazing and decorating techniques, such as opacified tin glazing and the luster painting most likely introduced by specialists migrating from farther east, Iraq or Egypt.<sup>4</sup> On Jerba, none of these new, more easily datable, glazed types were found during the survey field pickup. Instead, older ceramic-

3 See for a full discussion of ceramic production and importation, and chrono-typologies during the earlier periods of settlement, see Fontana, Ben Taher, and Capelli, “La ceramic a Jerba,” 236–7. Fig. 16.38 locates the later kilns in relation to the earlier ones.

4 Daoulati, “La production vert et brun” (the catalog *Le vert et le brun* [1995], in which this study appeared, presents the wider picture of the spread of the opacified glaze technique throughout western Mediterranean ceramic workshops). On a similar topic, see also Gragueb Shatti, “La céramique vert et brun.”

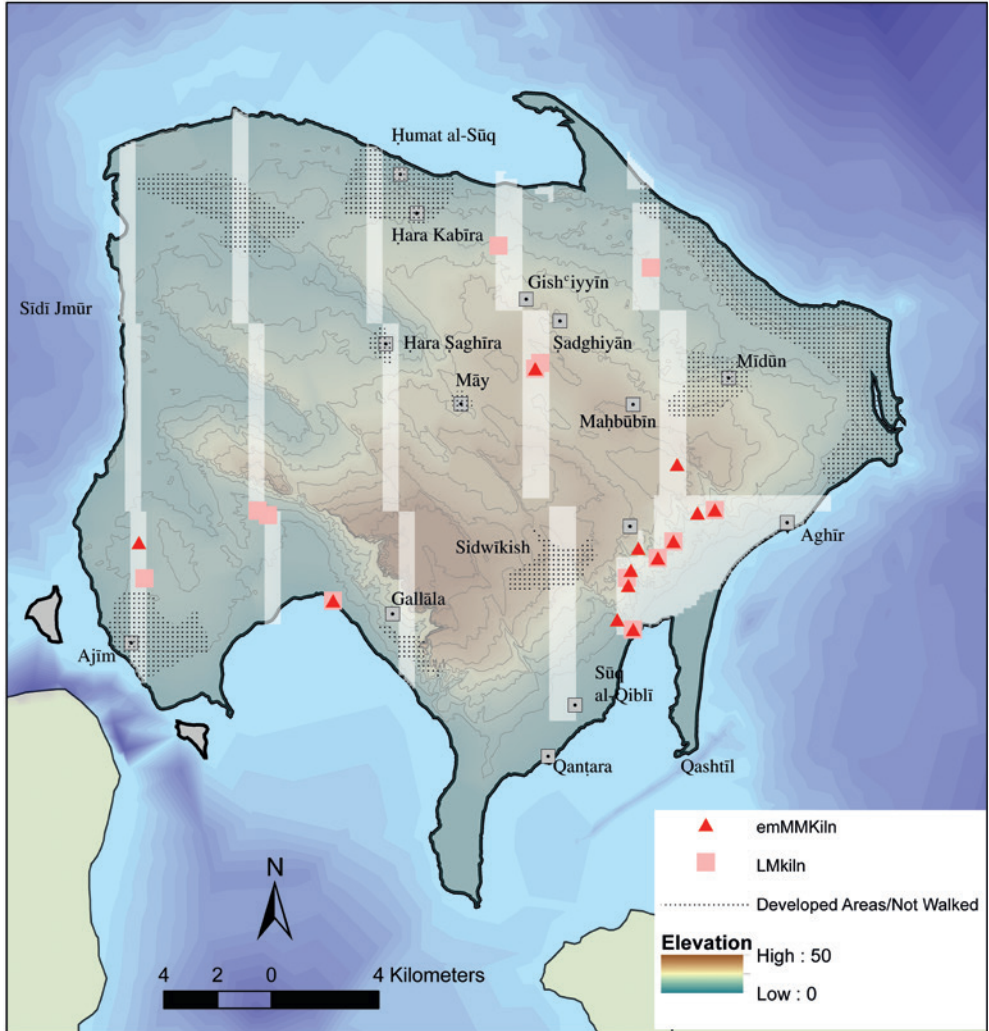


MAP 22.2 *Late Roman amphorae and coarse ware production sites of Jerba.*

MAP: M. FRACHETTI.

making habits continued, producing domestic wares for eating, cooking, and storage.<sup>5</sup> For the EM period (700–1050 CE), kilns were found at the same or nearby places where earlier ceramic production had taken place.

5 See Holod and Cirelli, “Islamic Pottery from Jerba,” for a fuller discussion of continuities in the ceramic-making habits of Late Antique and medieval Jerba. Later ceramic production and finds from the survey are discussed by Cirelli in Holod, Fentress, and Drine, *Jerba Studies*, vol. 2.



MAP 22.3 *Kilns from all medieval periods.*

MAP: M. FRACHETTI.

Other dating for individual sites could be derived from the historic record: sources and archival documents. Yet written sources are spotty and archives non-existent for the medieval (EM, MM, and LM) periods. On Jerba, the medieval and early modern epigraphic record is thin and limited to mosque sites; and even then only in the LM period and later.<sup>6</sup> For the EM period, no epigra-

<sup>6</sup> The epigraphic record found for Jerban mosques appears late in the medieval periods, and for the most part dates repairs, and documents the presence of individuals or prayers rather

phy has been identified. Mosque sites recorded during the survey, then, could be dated only by the surrounding domestic sites, and for the most part these are most securely datable to the MM period, namely, after 1050 CE. True, we have given some mosque sites an EM, pre-1050 CE date, although a tenth-century date would be more feasible.<sup>7</sup> Apparently, each mosque functioned as the center of its own community (*jāmaʿ al-muṣallin*) only. And according to the information that emerged from the textual record about the later (LM, Mod 1, and Mod 2) periods, abandonment of a mosque site would have meant that its community had moved away, and often no one else replaced those users or took up the use of this site.<sup>8</sup>

Still, thanks to the chrono-typology constructed from the survey and test trenches, our project was able to detect major changes in the settlement pattern for these later (medieval and modern) periods of Jerban settlement history when compared with the earlier periods. Key among these changes were a large-scale abandonment of antique urban centers, a retreat of rural settlement away from the coasts, and the introduction of a dense array of small farms in specific areas in a completely different pattern. While such changes became evident from the survey, their causes could only be adduced from the larger geopolitical or historic movements.

The Byzantine reconquest of Africa Proconsularis, and of the island of Jerba, from the Vandals in 530 would have played an important role in reconnecting and/or enlivening the trading patterns of the island with the ports of Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, however, because Meninx, the major Roman and Late Antique city on Jerba, functioned as the major port and trade entrepôt, it was also most open to the impact of the so-called Justinian plague of 540–1. The plague's appearance first in Egypt near Alexandria, and then in the eastern and central Mediterranean is now being studied with renewed attention.<sup>9</sup> Occurring in several waves until 750, its presence must be calibrated into an explanation of the changes in settlement pattern and density on Jerba.

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than new foundations. See, for example, the earliest recorded inscription in Jami' Bu Zid, with the date of 601/1203 recorded in El-Mrabet, *Mudawwanat*, 65–9.

7 The historical narrative, discussed below, does date the founding of at least one mosque that is called *al-masjid al-kabīr* to the tenth century. It fell outside of our survey zone and was a Wahbi foundation in the northern region of the island in any case. See Holod, Fentress, and Drine, *Jerba Studies*, vol. 2.

8 We were able to detect this pattern for the Mod 1 and 2 periods, and discuss it at length in vol. 2 of *Jerba Studies*, which deals with medieval and modern periods.

9 See, for example, Little, *Plague and the End of Antiquity*, for a recent consideration of the impact of this plague cycle on the Late Antique world. See also the more recent study of Ellenblum, *Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean*.

Within the scope of one century, then, the island would have undergone a considerable demographic diminution, and apparently became deurbanized. Thus, when the Islamic conquest hit the island space for the first time in last third of the seventh century, this place (and its main urban entity of Meninx) was no longer the prosperous fabled island. As a producer of purple dye and purple-dyed goods, which had been its role throughout the Roman and Late Antique periods, Jerba had afforded luxurious outfitting of villa estates and public monuments, built out of spectacular stone components imported from a variety of specialized quarries around the Mediterranean. By the last third of the seventh century, however, it was a ghost of its former self. The Islamic conquest narrative calls the entire island a village (*qarya*).<sup>10</sup> This rural place was then additionally depopulated by the taking of prisoners and booty, as the conquest (*al-faḥʿan ʿunwaṭan*) is described as having been a violent one. Notably, and in contrast to what is now being proposed for other regions of North Africa at sites such as Tocra, Sbeitla, and others as a pattern of flourishing urban centers and a “busy countryside” throughout the early medieval period, such prosperity does not seem to have continued on Jerba.<sup>11</sup>

As an island, Jerba differs from many of the other main islands of the central Mediterranean in its geological make-up and its geographical features. Geologically, it is part of the proximate mainland peninsula, as only a narrow strait separates it from the mainland at Jorf and the town of Ajim. The strait opens into the Gulf of Bu Ghrara, but maintains its depth in an underwater wadi running along the southeastern coast of the island. Otherwise, the waters of this gulf were as rich in fishing resources as they were treacherous with their abundant shallows. The separation between island and mainland appears to have been even less crucial during the medieval centuries (EM and MM) for two other reasons. First, connections to the mainland continued to flow through the old Flavian-period causeway (presently called al-Qantara), though the causeway appears to have been cut off during the LM period. Second, the

10 Ruwayfaʿa b. Thabit al-Ansari (d. 676) led a raid to the island in ca. AH 47 according to Hanash al-Sanʿani (d. 718), as reported in *al-Aʿlam*, who participated with Ruwayfaʿ in the conquest of Jerba; cf. al-Dabbagh, *Maʿalim al-iman*, 157 (citations in this chapter are to the Maktabat al-Khanji bi-Misr edition, Cairo, 1968); al-ʿAsqalani, *Taqrib al-tahdhib*, 5; al-Zirkili, *al-Aʿlam*, 2:222. This conquest is called a violent one.

11 For a reevaluation of Late Antique urban sites in North Africa and their continuing viability after the Islamic conquest and up to the ninth century, see Fenwick, “From Africa to Ifriqiya,” but see also Thébert and Biget, “L’Afrique après la disparition,” and Cambuzat, *L’évolution des cités*.

surrounding seas of the island continued to provide its inhabitants with resources and refuges behind the shallows.

By the end of the sixth century/early seventh century, urban life at the antique urban centers on the island – Burgu, Ghizen, \*Har/Hares, and Meninx – was effectively discontinued (Map 22.4). The formal centers of these urban sites were abandoned and/or devolved into villages on their outskirts, and in some cases became locations for later weekly markets. Their disused monuments continued to be spoliated for building materials for many later structures, both public as well as domestic. While such abandonment was clear on all four sites, our survey was able to document this transition along the southeastern zone of the island in particular detail.

The large and sprawling center of Meninx ceased to function as a coherent urban site. According to our more detailed survey and archaeological investigations on the site, the manufacture of the purple dye in order to dye the wool coming from Jerba's immediately proximate mainland peninsulas would have ceased by the end of the sixth century or at the latest at the beginning of the seventh century.<sup>12</sup> On the outskirts of the former city, life appears to have continued at a diminished scale. On its eastern borders, a few suburban centers have been recorded. Sites which could be designated as villages with kilns continued to produce a variety of vessels and containers.<sup>13</sup> Their production could be characterized as coarse wares, which formed domestic sets. Containers for transporting olive oil also remained the same for some time, an indication that trade networks that had been a feature during the Late Antique periods 1 and 2 were maintained, though on a smaller scale.<sup>14</sup>

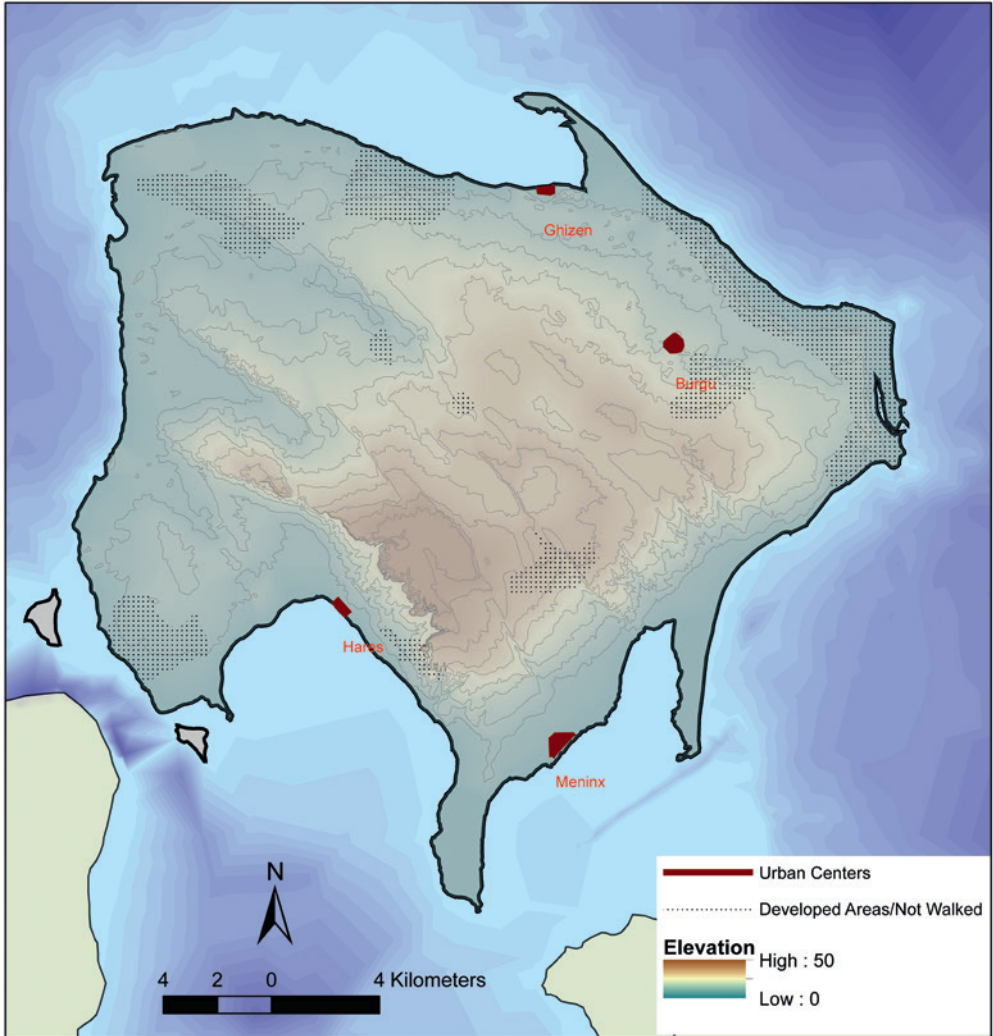
During the first decades of Muslim rule, the population of Jerba might have been tempted to take part in the general Berber revolt against the newcomers led by the redoubtable Berber queen, al-Kahina, during 698–703. Again, however, there is no direct indication of Jerban involvement even though the island's location at the edge of the frontier drawn by her between the Arab Muslims and the Berbers is suggestive.<sup>15</sup> The violent conquest of Jerba most

12 Fentress, Drine, and Holod, *Jerba Studies*, 1:196–200.

13 Holod and Cirelli, "Islamic Pottery from Jerba."

14 Later Genoese sources mention a type of container for olive oil called "jarre jerbini," but these cannot be dated earlier than the fourteenth century; see Holod, Fentress, and Drine, *Jerba Studies*, vol. 2.

15 Ibn al-Raḥiq mentions the region of Gabès from which the Arab forces were driven to Tripoli. He actually refers to this region as the limit of the counterattack by al-Kahina. See Talbi, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "al-Kāhina." Interestingly, this is the same



MAP 22.4 *Ancient urban centers.*

MAP: M. FRACHETTI.

likely resulted in a loss of population on the island and a partial rupture in its social and settlement patterns.

On the northern borders of Meninx, at the first rise above the coastal plain, two fortified towers/residences were built during the Byzantine control over

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geopolitical line as the Mareth line, a system of fortifications built by the French in southern Tunisia prior to WWII to defend against attacks from Libya.

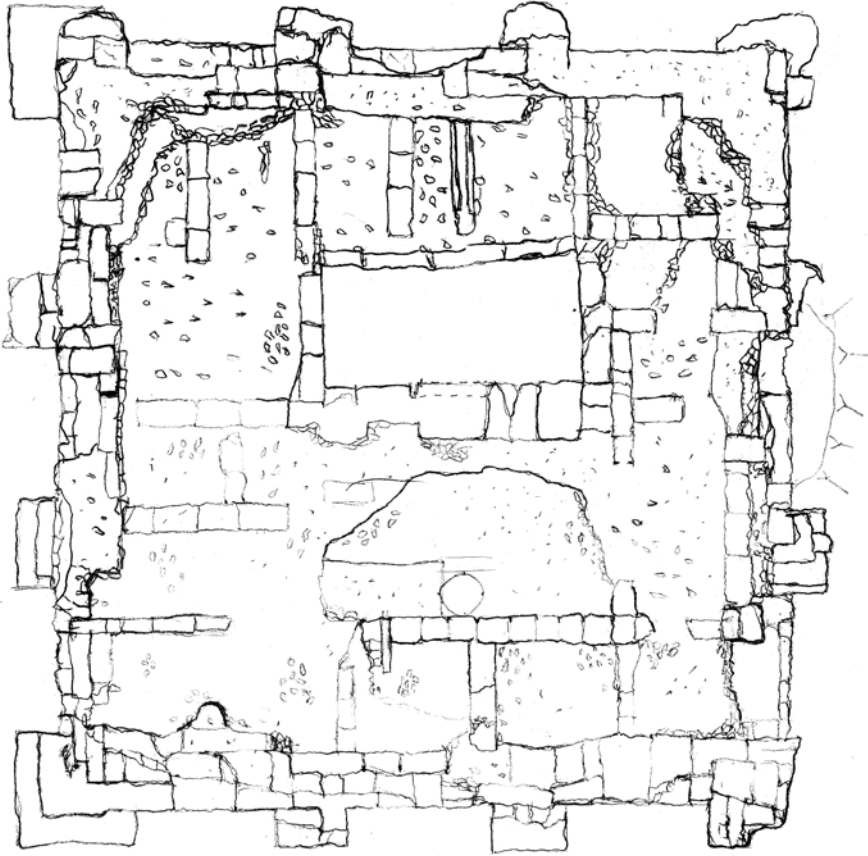


FIGURE 22.2 *Qasr Ghardaya plan.*  
PLAN: E. FENTRESS.

island space, likely during the second occupation.<sup>16</sup> Presently named Tala and Ghardaya, these sites continued to be occupied at least into the next period (EM) (Fig. 22.2). Excavations on the site of Tala showed a later purposeful dismantlement of the structure, although it was difficult to establish at what date precisely this would have taken place. Certainly by the end of the MM period (1050–1300 CE), this fort had ceased functioning. No early name for this site could be recovered from the available textual sources. The site of Ghardaya was found equally dismantled by our team, but in this case its name can be linked to the name Qasr Ghardaya, a location attested in historical sources and the

16 For a full presentation of these sites, see Fentress in Fentress, Drine, and Holod, *Jerba Studies*, 1:201–6.



first such site to be mentioned for Jerba in Arabic sources after the conquest narrative.

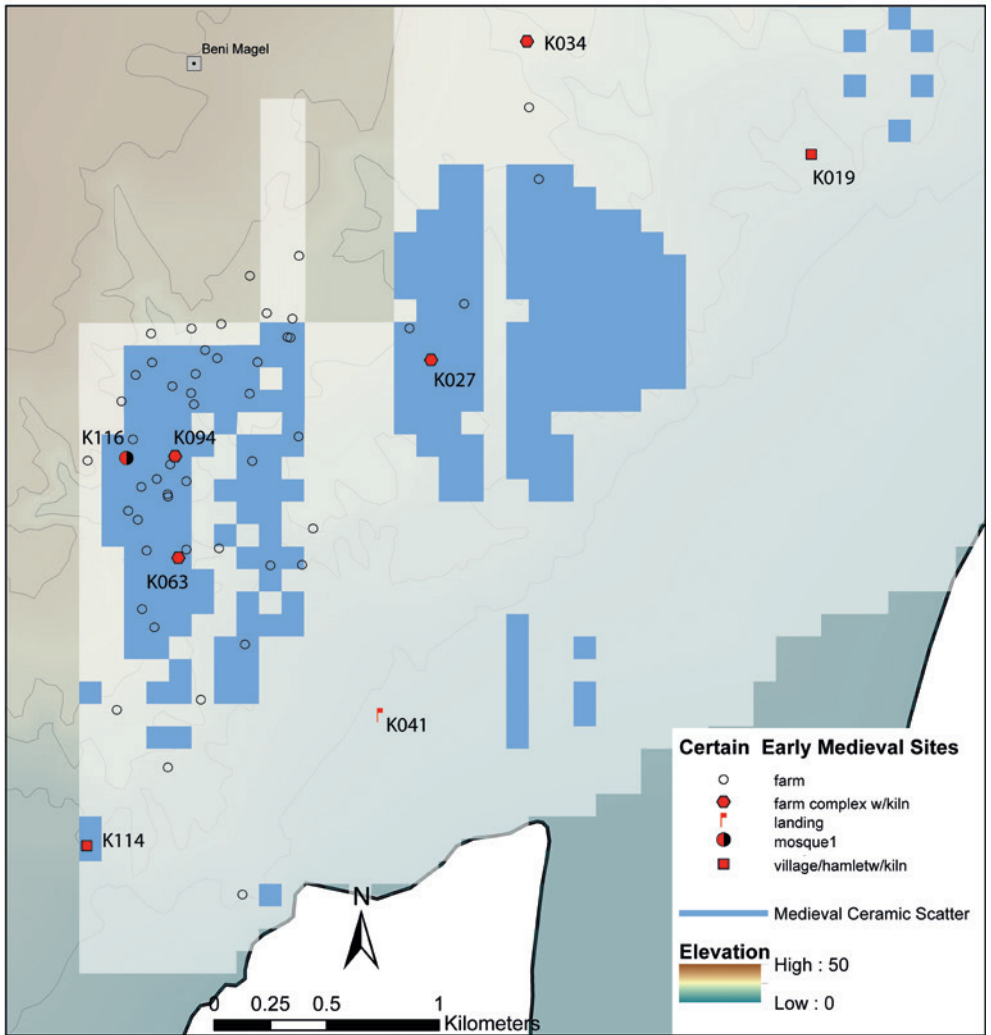
Qasr Ghardaya can be recognized as the name for the refuge of Ibn Khalaf, the Nukkar Ibadi leader.<sup>17</sup> This was the place to which he retreated with his followers and his Berber allies, the Banu Zwagha, after being defeated in Tripolitania. The choice of this fort would imply that the outskirts of Meninx, where this fort was located, and probably the entire southeastern zone of the island came to be regarded as territory receptive to and/or controlled by this group. The Nukkar faction of the Jerban Ibadis then held this territory from the ninth century until the coming of the Ottomans.

While our survey recorded a collapse of urban centers by the end of the LA2 period, the total number of sites found both in this period and in the subsequent EM period appears to be similar. What is key to note, then, is the completely different pattern of settlement. It now appeared as a densely packed clustering of individual farms located on slight rises, with the lowest grounds left for cultivation. In short, such a pattern is known from the oasis settlements of the Ibadis, such as the Mzab or others. In addition, entire areas of the island's interior were set aside as tree grove areas, known later as *ghaba* (Map 22.5).

Unlike the purple dye production at Kairouan, which apparently continued for some time through the seventh and eighth centuries,<sup>18</sup> the dyeing industry ceased on Jerba. Or, more correctly stated, the purple dye and purple-dyed fabric production located at Meninx ceased. Whether there was any other textile dyeing production for this time is difficult to determine; it apparently flourished in later centuries again, but now utilizing locally grown indigo as colorant. What is clear is that the new settlement pattern determined by our survey data could be assigned to new settlers within the ninth and tenth centuries. They located themselves at a distance, though still in some contact with the remaining population on the island.

17 The Nukkar were the first factional split within the Ibadi sect after the proclamation of the imamate state at Tahart in 778. The faction stems originally from the opposition against the election of 'Abd al-Wahhab, son of the founder of the Rustamid state. This opposition resulted in a revolt led by Yazid b. Fandin at the very beginning of 'Abd al-Wahhab's reign. The Nukkar were forced from their territories near Tripoli (Tarabulus) at Arisa by the Ibadi governor, Abu Mansur, and his Wahbi allies, the Bani Yahrasin; see Lewicki, *Etudes ibadites*.

18 See M'Charek, M'charek, "De Saint Augustin à al-Bakri," for an example of this type of transition in the region of Kairouan. On the continuing production of purple elsewhere in the Mediterranean, see also "Purple, Production of Purple Dye" and "Control of Purple Textiles," in A. Kazhdan, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* and <http://elearning.unifr.ch/apb/typika/artefact/1420> (accessed June 5, 2016).



MAP 22.5 *Microstudy of the southeastern zone.*

MAP: M. FRACHETTI.

The events describing the arrival of these new settlers are mentioned in the main Ibadi chronicle for the island, the *Kitab siyar al-a'imma wa akhbarihim*. Writing his history during the eleventh to twelfth century, Abu Zakariya' b. Abu Bakr could be considered the main Ibadi chronicler of medieval Jerba through his work, also known as *Tarikh Abu Zakariya'*.<sup>19</sup> Granted, he belonged to the

19 Abu Zakariya', *Kitab al-siyar*.

competing Wahbi faction of the Ibadis, and would therefore not have focused much on the processes of Nukkar infiltration into the island's territory in the late eighth to ninth century. (We have no Nukkari sources available.) Yet this event and associated power struggles are mentioned in this Ibadi text alone and not in any standard (Sunni) historical works describing this period. Such an omission would indicate that the island space was already out of mainstream consideration, and had fallen into the sectarian world of the Ibadis.

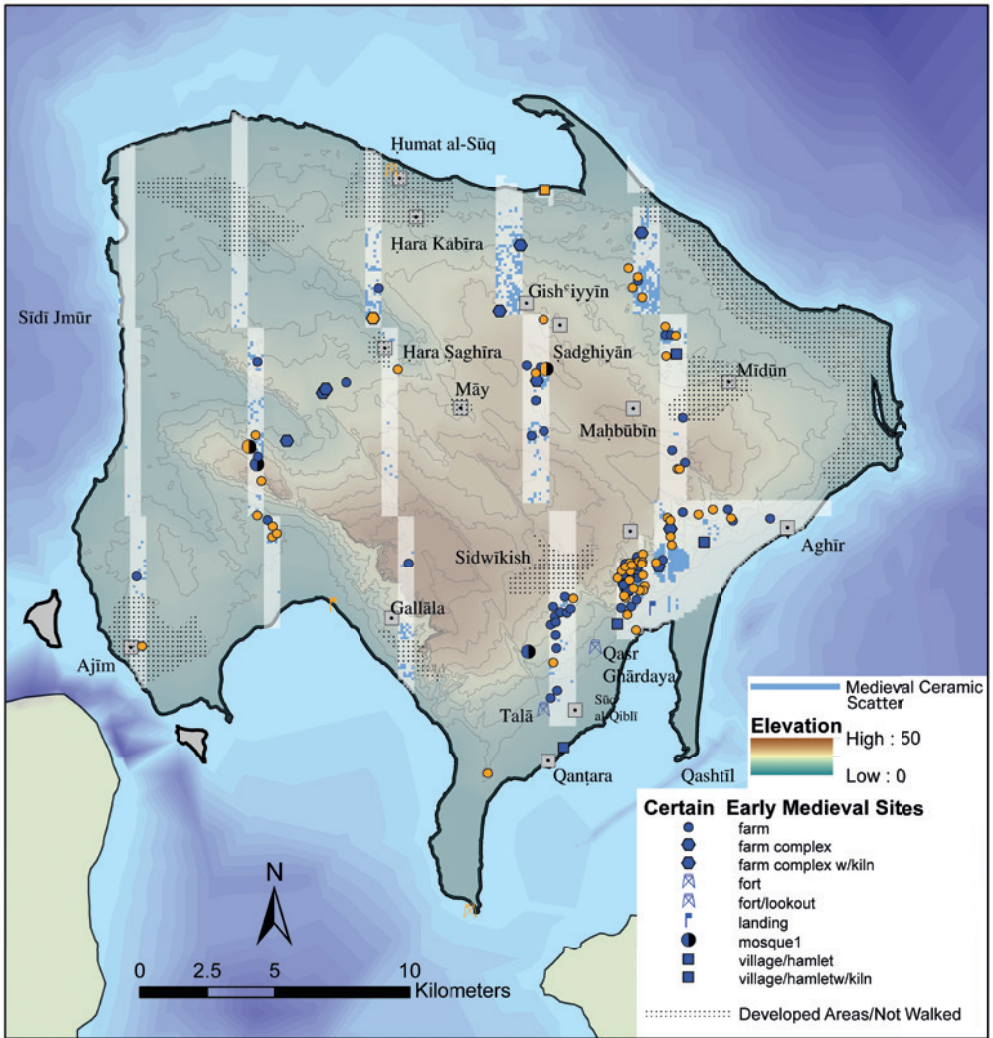
Early on in the development of the Islamic polity, Sunnis, Shi'a, and other sects such as the Kharijis had contested the leadership of the Islamic community. It was finally taken over by the Sunni (and subsequently partly by the Shi'i) faction while the other, smaller, sects were relegated to the fringes of the geographic and symbolic space of the *dār al-Islām*.<sup>20</sup> A branch of the Kharijis, the group that had separated itself from the Islamic community in about 685, the Ibadi sectarian separatists launched a polity based on an interpretation of leadership different from that of both the majority Sunni and the minority Shi'i interpretation.<sup>21</sup> They were particularly successful in finding adherents in the Maghrib. The Ibadi world anchored itself in the eighth century in the highlands of present-day Algeria, and defined itself through the Rustamid imamate centered at Tahart (Tahert in today's Algeria), with a chiefly Berber following. Ibadi authority extended along the developing pre-Saharan trade routes from east to west through an archipelago of oases. By the end of the ninth century, the Ibadis were systematically engaged in importing slaves from the Sudan into Egypt and the Sunni Mediterranean space.<sup>22</sup> It is difficult to determine whether the better available, and better known, Sunni sources ignore the island of Jerba simply because it played a limited role in the larger polity and trade, because it was still a space aside, or because, likely, it had already become part of the underreported Ibadi world (Map 22.6 and Map 22.7).

With the beginning of the ninth century, as previously mentioned, the (Sunni) Aghlabid dynasty had established a line of the forts (*ribāṭs*) along the coast of Ifriqiya against renewed threats from the sea, mainly by the Byzantine navy. As noted by Djelloul, the south and the Syrte region, as opposed to the

20 On the detailed history of the Ibadīya and its genesis, see Lewicki, *Études ibadites*, and his entry in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "al-Ibādīya"; for a more current summary, see Prévost, *Les Ibadites de Djerba*.

21 On the Tahart imamate, see Lewicki, *Études ibadites*, and Savage, *Gateway to Hell*. The leader of the community, the imam, had to be known as a just man (*al-imām al-ʿādil*).

22 On the development of long-distance trade in the area of North Africa, see Lombard, *Golden Age of Islam*; Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization*, chs. 1–2; Savage, *Gateway to Hell*.



MAP 22.6 *Early medieval sites from the Jerba probabilistic and purposive survey.*  
 MAP: M. FRACHETTI.

rest of Ifriqiya, were in the early medieval period part of the Ibadi sphere in which the *ribāt*, as a Sunni institution, was absent.<sup>23</sup> Even though military installations can be found in the south, and have been mentioned in the sources

23 Djelloul, *al-Ribat al-bahriya*, 173; Chabbi and Rabbat, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Ribāt,” 510–24; and El-Bahi, *Susa wa al-Sahil*.



MAP 22.7 *Ifriqiya and the Ibadī world.*

MAP: M. FRACHETTI.

especially under the word *qaṣr*, these should not be confused with the institution of the *ribāṭ*.<sup>24</sup>

During the Jerba survey we did not record the Aghlabid model of settlement: an urban site on the coast with a hypostyle mosque located near a *ribāṭ*, as is the case with Susa (Sousse) or Sfax. The other model of Aghlabid territorial control was a small fortification within an agricultural hinterland, which is the case on sites along the coast between Bizerte and Gabès.<sup>25</sup> The latter explains the textual mentions of agricultural lands owned or used by *murābiṭs*.<sup>26</sup>

24 An example of such a structure near the island of Jerba (presumably under Ibadī control because of its location) is Qasr Marith. On the other hand, near Gabès there is a series of *quṣūr* such as Tubulbu and Sijja, all probably Sunni as was Gabès; see Djelloul, *al-Ribat al-bahriya*, 174.

25 The majority of fortifications are actually of this smaller size. See Djelloul, *al-Ribat al-bahriya*, 43–173.

26 Djelloul, *al-Ribat al-bahriya*, 200–2.

The chief Aghlabid *ribāṭ* for the area closest to Jerba was located at Gabès on the mainland. None was reported on Jerba. Yet a fortified structure of similar scale and materials existed on the island and is datable within the medieval periods.<sup>27</sup> Does such a similarity allow for positing an Aghlabid toehold? Or must one look to the Norman expansion south from Sicily for a date of its construction as late as the twelfth century? There is formal resemblance between some Aghlabid fortifications and the first phase of al-Burj al-Kabir, although the identification of this phase as an Aghlabid fort remains circumstantial (Fig. 22.3).

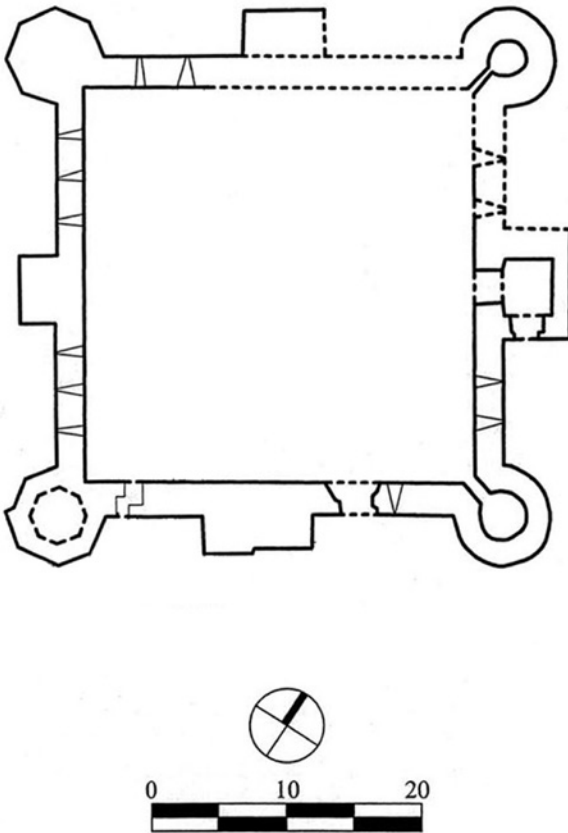


FIGURE 22.3 *The earliest phase of al-Burj al-Kabir.*  
PLAN: J. MATTHIEU.

27 See Savage, *Gateway to Hell*, 62–5; Rebstock, *Die Ibaditen*; Crone and Zimmermann, *Epistle of Salim*, appendix.

Whatever the answer, the only way in which such a structure could have been constructed and maintained would be to see it as completely independent from the territory of the island, certainly a break from the pattern seen in other *ribāts*. Yet such a suggestion becomes even more plausible when one considers the later history of this site on the island, and its almost complete dependence on supplies by sea alone.<sup>28</sup> In fact, this fortified outpost was a space apart, and the micro-history of its construction does not fall within the Ibadi narrative of the island.

Abu Zakariya's reports give a detailed account of Jerban events from the islanders' perspective. These reports, as stated, are partial as they appear to have been taken solely from the bias of the Wahbi faction, to which he belonged. Neither his account, nor any other available written source, represents the other contemporary Ibadi faction on the island, the Nukkar (also known as the Mistawa). It is only from the renditions of earlier events on Jerba reproduced by this author and our detailed survey that we can attempt a reconstruction of the internal processes of life and settlement on the island.<sup>29</sup>

By the second half of the ninth century, Jerba was definitely considered Ibadi territory. The space of the island (and its immediately connected mainland) was riven by factional disputes within the Ibadi sect. By this time, the sect had divided into two parts, the Wahbi and the Nukkar. The authority of the ruling Wahbi leader of Tahart, Muhammad b. Aflah (active 894–904), and his appointed governor in Tripoli, Abu Mansur, was being contested by the Nukkar (also known as Khalfi). Their leader, Ibn Khalaf, with his allies, the Berber tribe of Zwagha, finally lost the campaign against the governor. The Nukkar were, therefore, forced to emigrate from their territories near Tripoli at Arisa by Abu Mansur and his Wahbi allies, the Bani Yahrasin. The Zwagha tribe took refuge on Jerba in order to protect themselves, Ibn Khalaf, and their allies. They occupied Qasr Ghardaya, described above.<sup>30</sup> Ibn Khalaf appears to have been an Arab, while the Zwagha were Berbers.<sup>31</sup> This move suggests that Jerba had already become, or was in the process of becoming, a refuge for the Nukkar or non-Wahbi faction(s) of the Ibadis. Later, the Wahbi governor of Tripoli sent a

28 See Mathieu and Kahlaoui, "Fortifications." It is possible that a siege of Tripoli was led by 'Abd al-Wahhab b. Rustam, the second *khalifa* of the Rustamid state at Tahart (Tahert). Although there is disagreement about the exact dates of the reign of 'Abd al-Wahhab, all sources agree that he ruled between 787 and 803. According to Abu Zakariya', *Kitab al-siyar*, 87, n.1, Tripoli fell under 'Abd al-Wahhab's control.

29 Abu Zakariya', *Kitab al-siyar*, 1878.

30 Abu Zakariya', *Kitab al-siyar*, 151.

31 Abu Zakariya', *Kitab al-siyar*, 152–3.

member of the Bani Yahrasin to Jerba with money for the leader of the Zwagha (whom he calls the “settler” [*ma‘qil*] from Bani Maraya’) to persuade him to yield up or betray Ibn Khalaf.<sup>32</sup> However, he remained loyal.

This account allows us to reconstruct some aspects of early medieval life on Jerba. The island was apparently settled mainly by some of the Zwagha Berbers who were Ibadi, but anti-Wahbi. Their settlement does not seem to have been opposed actively by the remaining local population. In fact, they took over at least one of the preexisting Byzantine forts. Could tribal Berber ties be functioning here? Since the leader of the Zwagha tribe, the first Ibadi group on Jerba, was referred to as a settler (*ma‘aqil*) in Abu Zakariya’s account, it seems likely that this occupation marked the influx of a new population to the island. And the newcomers seem to have arrived by the southern accesses to the island. The current toponym of Bani Ma‘qil may still echo this settlement and might be referring to the Nukkar’s old southeastern core of the island.<sup>33</sup> The island, then, functioned as a place of refuge or even exile for these rebels. Ironically, this faction was rebelling against the Wahbi state of Tahart, itself considered a rebel state by the official (i.e., Sunni) historians.

The later Wahbi arrival on Jerba in the tenth century appears to have come in from the north and probably by sea, and is the only internal narrative that we have for the island. Thus Jerban Ibadi history is actually Wahbi first and foremost. The ninth-century settlement pattern recorded by the survey shows the presence of the Nukkar faction in detail. One thing that does seem clear, however, is that the Aghlabid dynasty is totally out of the picture on the territory of the island according to both sets of data. Or, to put it differently, Jerba appears to have been outside the orbit of the Aghlabid world.

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32 This son of Khalaf b. al-Samh rebelled in Tripoli against ‘Abd al-Wahhab.

33 This is one most probable explanation for the origin of the name of Bani Ma‘qil. Other explanations, which we discuss in Holod, Fentress, and Drine, *Jerba Studies*, vol. 2, suggest that this term could refer to an Arab tribe which came in with the Almohads in the twelfth century, or later as supporters of the Wahbi faction in internecine battles.