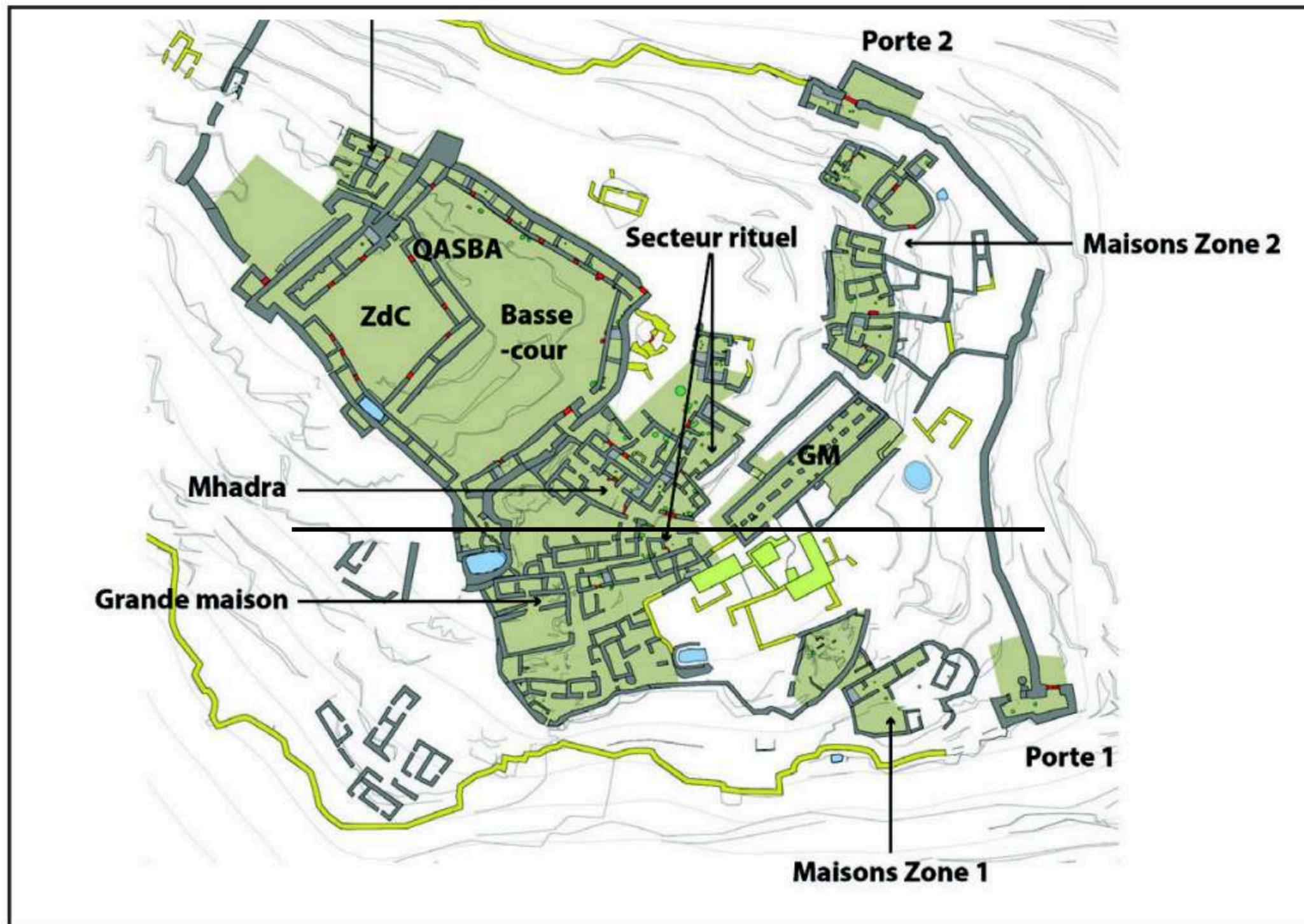
An aerial photograph of a vast, hilly landscape. The terrain is a mix of brown and green, suggesting a semi-arid or high-altitude environment. In the far distance, a large, calm blue lake is visible, surrounded by more hills. The sky is a pale, clear blue. The overall scene is one of a wide, open natural space.

Practical guide

The stages of the journey through the Igiliz fortress



Source : Plan général de l'acropole d'Igîlîz. Fili, Abdallah, Saleh Ettahiri, Ahmed, Staével, Jean-Pierre, Serrat, Ihssane, "Première approche typologique de la céramique protoalmohade d'Igîlîz (Maroc)", *Bulletin d'archéologie marocaine (BAM)*, Insap, 25 (2020), 101-123.

1st step

📍 Stop after the parking lot, in front of the signs.

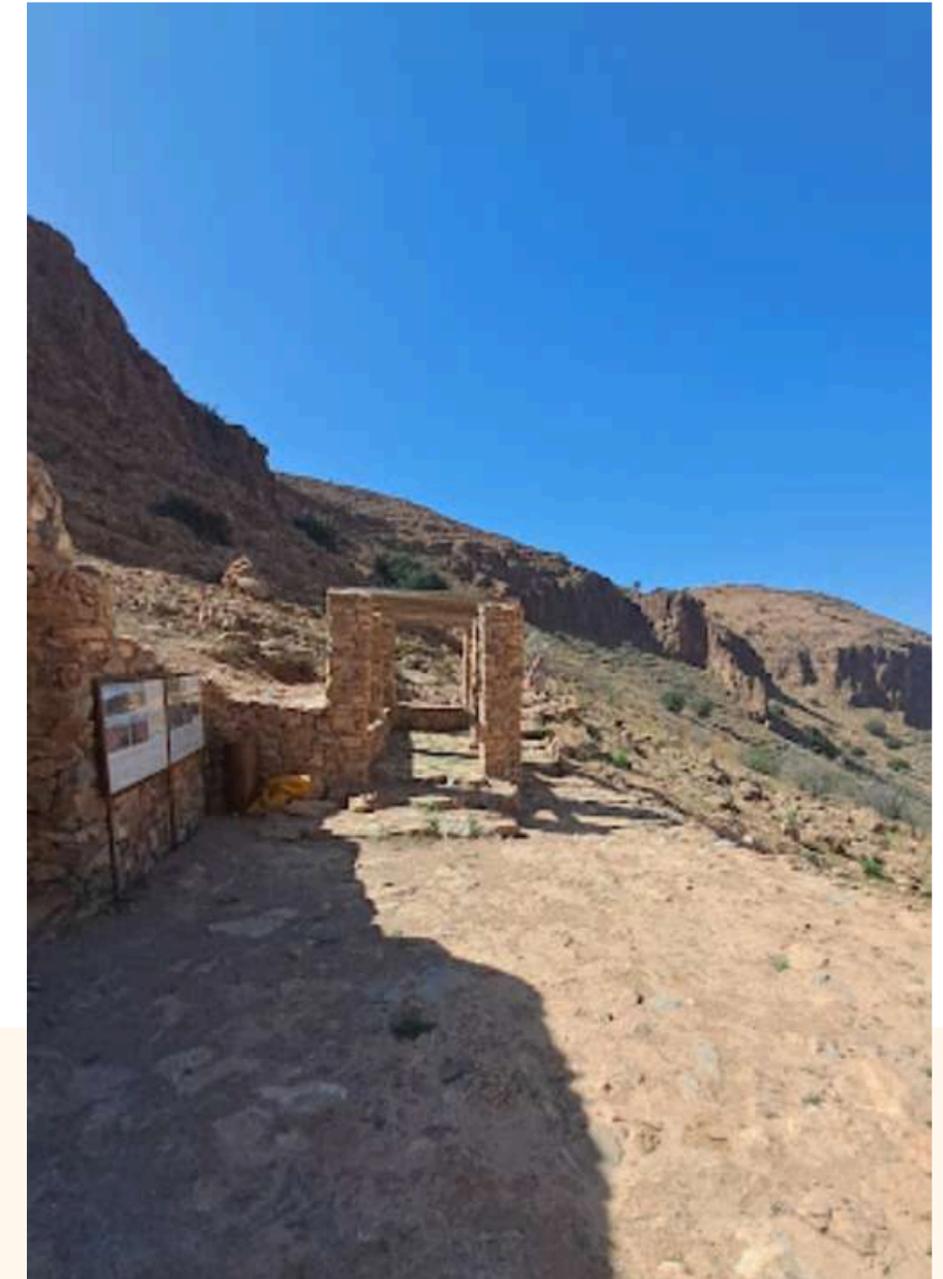
The Importance of the Igiliz Site: The Uniqueness of a Place Hidden by History :

The Igiliz site does not appear in any historical texts referring to the Almohads. It was overlooked in their history, which only mentioned the birth of Ibn Tumart and details of his life. The location of the site remained uncertain. Medieval texts provided no specific details about Igiliz, describing it only as "a mountain and a rugged place equipped with a citadel." One text, mentioning how the Almohads managed to seize power, refers to this site and specifies the presence of a fortress and a kasbah near the village of Tifiguite.

However, in 2005, one year after the start of archaeological excavations at the site, Igiliz was located through the analysis of Almoravid maps and the study of historical texts. Additionally, on a French map dating back to 1930, the mountain housing the Igiliz fortress is referred to as the "Mountain of Ibn Tumart."

Key words

- > **Geographical** Position of Igiliz and the Valley in Morocco
- > **Origin** of the Word **Igiliz**
- > **Toughmert** Village
- > **Al-Mahdi Ibn Tumart** and His Journey to the Middle East
- > **Role** of Tribal Organization





Local Tradition

When excavations began at the Igiliz site in 2005, women from nearby villages stated that the site had lost its spiritual significance. In the past, locals would gather there for a day, praying and preparing meals for the occasion. Many women also visited the site to pray for their dreams to come true.

However, when French archaeologists arrived, the locals referred to them using the Amazigh term "Iromiyen," meaning "foreigner."

Today, some women still visit the site to continue the celebrations, albeit in a simple manner. It is no longer a place of prayer.

Key words

Discovery of the Site (When? How? Who?)

Local Traditions

Awards Won (2015: Archaeology Prize from the Simone and Cino Del Duca Foundation / 2023:

Designated as a Moroccan National Heritage Site)

2nd step

The Medieval Village of Tifiguit

Tifiguit is a small, typical medieval village that remains inhabited to this day. The slope on which it is located has been terraced because this part of the mountain is exposed to strong winds. The wind makes farming challenging, which is why the inhabitants adapted the land to grow crops, particularly wheat, a cereal crop. This village is thus a testament to an ancient agricultural civilization.

There is also arboriculture, with the cultivation of olive trees, carob trees, and argan trees, as well as beekeeping. Additionally, an Azib can be found here, a space dedicated to animal husbandry and grazing. A single man is responsible for tending to the grazing animals of the entire village.

Tifiguit is a typical village that exemplifies the traditional agricultural and pastoral practices of the Vallée de l'Arghen.

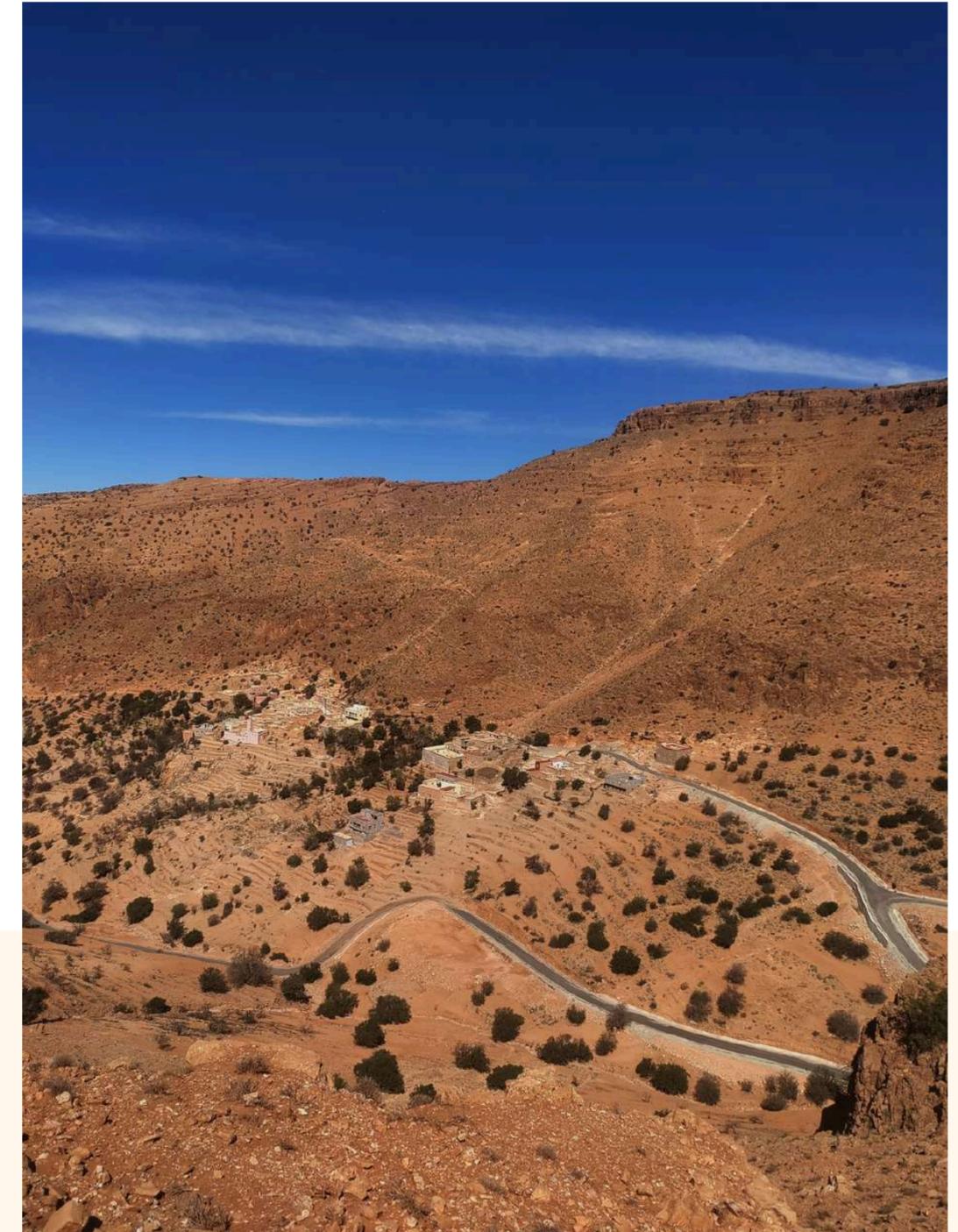
For more information, see the EAU Dossier.

Mots-clés

- > Way of Life
- > Terraced Farming
- > Arboriculture
- > Animal Husbandry
- > Beekeeping



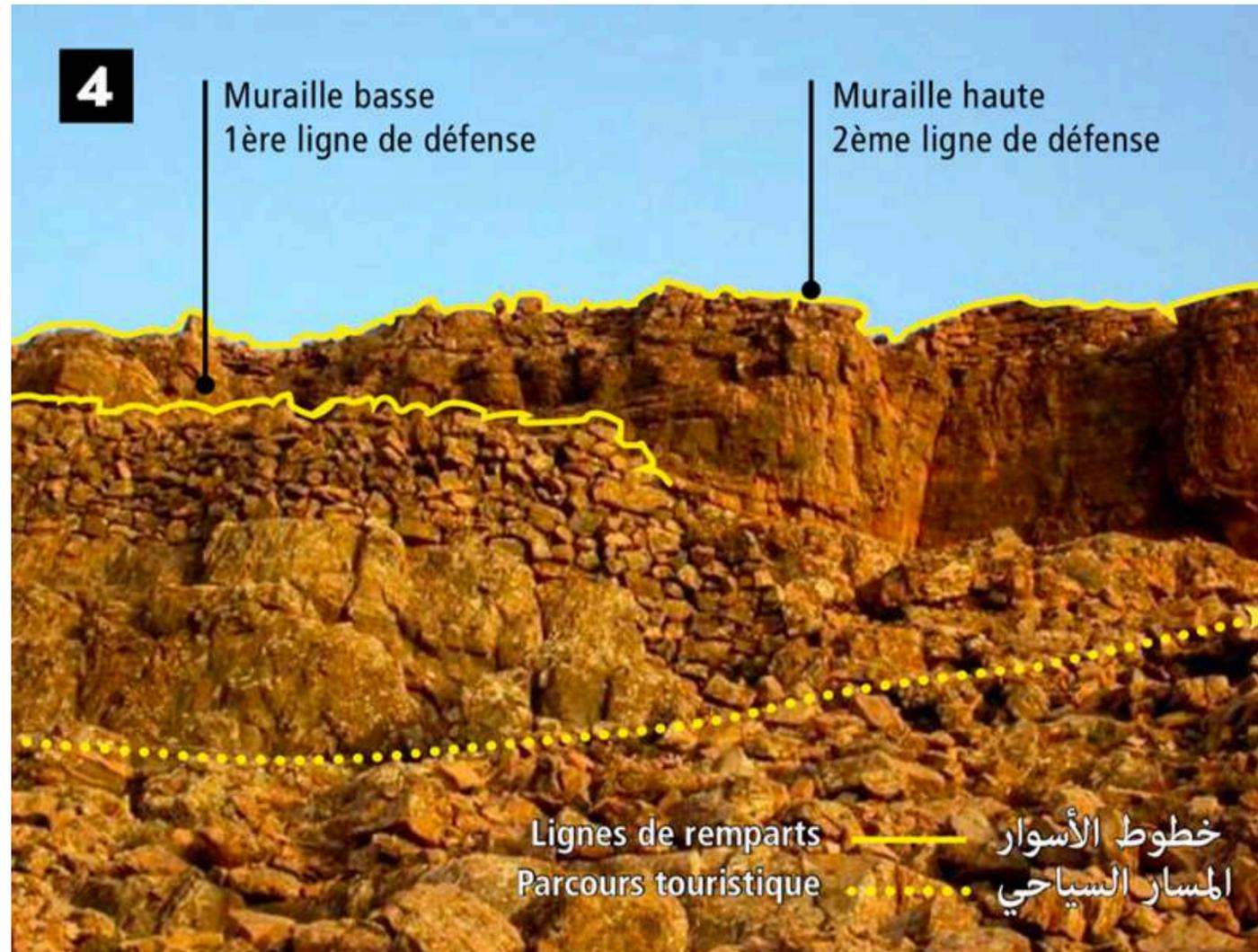
Stop at the rest area located between the parking lot and the entrance to the fortress.



3rd step

Stop before the entrance to the fortress, in front of the panoramic view of the mountains.

The Defensive System of the Igiliz Fortress



Source : N.s., « Igiliz », s.d., Ministère de la Culture, [en ligne], <https://archeologie.culture.gouv.fr/fr/igiliz>.

The Qasbah had four towers, each containing stairs that provided access to a panoramic view of the entire Anti-Atlas, ensuring the security of the site.

It was surrounded by two walls, one high and the other low. Various versions surround the history of the construction of these walls, which form the fortress's defensive system. One version claims that before the military operations began, the mountains had already been fortified: "Ibn Tumart is only credited with digging cisterns during the winter of 1122-1123, in preparation for the upcoming siege."

The other version maintains that the fortification work was carried out by the spiritual leader of the Almohads upon his arrival. "He is also attributed with a stone mosque that he supposedly built with his own hands."

Key words

- > Local **Architecture** and **Building Methods**
- > The Significance of the Construction of **Kasbahs** and **Agadirs** in the Valley ⁶

Stop before the entrance to the fortress, in front of the panoramic view of the mountains.



100 150 200

4ème étape

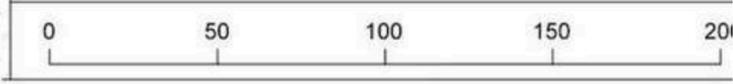
The Entrance to the Igiliz Fortress

The visible traces beneath our feet and on either side allow us to identify the location of the two supports that held a door and formed the entrance to the site. This door was monumental, similar to those found in Seville or other medieval locations in Morocco. As seen in the palaces built by the Almohads, the entrance does not lead directly into the Kasbah. A U-shaped corridor leads into the fortress, ensuring the security of the site.



Key words

- > **Architecture** of Houses
- > **Hospitality** in Moroccan Homes
- > **Historical Monuments** of Medieval Morocco
- > **Historical Declarations** of Tumart



5th step

The Mosque of the Qasbah



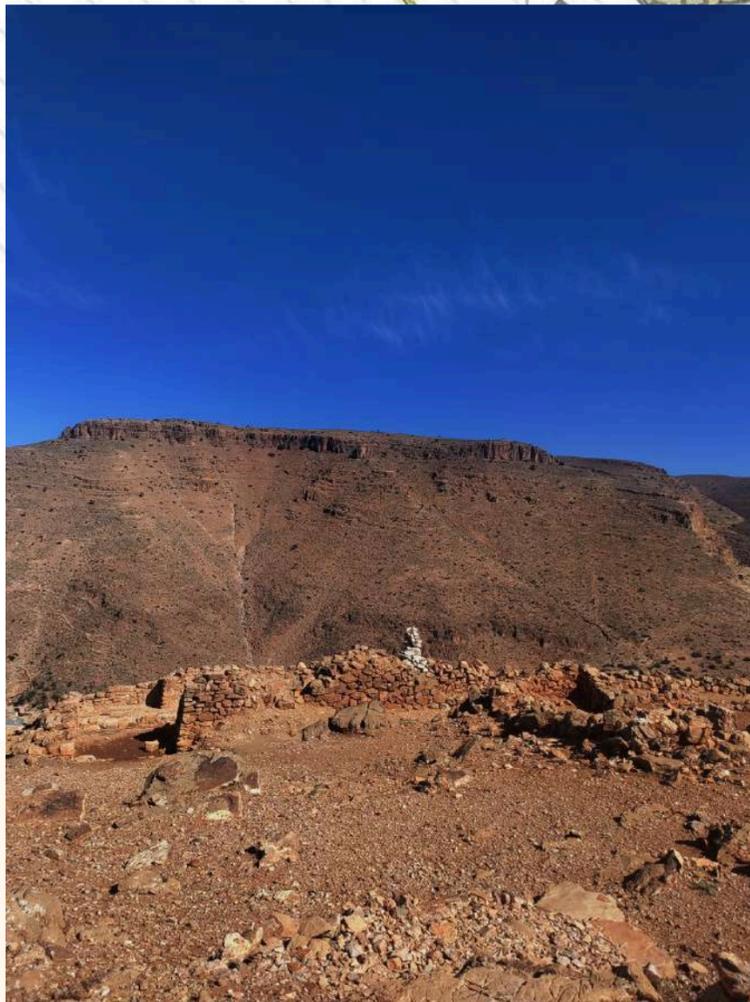
This mosque was the first to be built by the Almohads. The first structure mentioned in historical texts regarding Igiliz was the mosque. Indeed, when settling on the mountain heights, the first initiative of Tumart was to build a place of prayer. When archaeologists began to locate the Igiliz site in 2004, their initial goal was to find this religious structure. Unlike the imposing buildings constructed under the Almohads, such as in Seville, the one in Igiliz remains a modest place of worship, as it marks the beginnings of the movement. This sanctuary was also built in several phases, with expansions made gradually as more followers joined the movement.

In general, Muslims pray towards a single direction called the "qibla." However, Ibn Tumart introduced a new way of practicing the religion, asserting that the direction a believer prays towards is not of great importance. Yet, in Islam, there is only one "qibla," the one direction a believer should face while praying. In the mosque built by the Almohads, the spot reserved for the imam was placed between the east and the west. This is referred to in Arabic as "Tallmant." For Ibn Tumart, this was a way to establish a new religious interpretation, marking a break from certain traditional practices of Islam.

Key words

- > **Role** of Mosques in Morocco and in the Valley
- > **Architecture** of Mosques in the Valley

Stop a few steps to the right of
the mosque.



6th step

Medieval Morocco and the Great Wall of the Qasbah

It is one of the three gates of the fortress. It allowed for controlling the comings and goings of visitors and protecting the building. Between this gate and the mosque, there was a small neighborhood of stone houses.

The ramparts protected the residents of the Qasbah by utilizing the natural rock formations. During the construction of the site, the natural defenses of the mountain were cleverly preserved or reinforced.

Four towers also rose, serving to monitor the surroundings but also to impress, demonstrating the authority and power of the Almohad movement even before entering the Qasbah. They also symbolized their dominance over the territory.

Key words

- > **Architecture of Kasbahs and Ksours** in Morocco
- > **Fortress**
- > **Military Defenses**
- > **Symbolic Role of Doors / Gateways** in Houses, Medinas, Kasbahs, Riads

Stop at the benches that lead to the entrance of Ibn Tumart's meeting place



7th step

Visiting Ibn Tumart: The "Waiting Room"

Before entering Ibn Tumart's reception hall, visitors had to wait in two waiting rooms. One was reserved for foreign delegations coming from afar, while the other was for locals from nearby villages, who came to ask religious or legal questions, for example, and could wait for several days before being received. In the room reserved for important figures, archaeologists found traces of delegations from Sudan and North Africa, such as Tunisian coins. They also discovered items like plates and pottery.

Key words

- > **Spirit and Culture** of Hospitality in the Valley
- > **Respect and Comfort** of Guests

8th step

Craftsmanship in the Time of Ibn Tumart

Many pottery fragments were discovered at Igiliz, testifying to an ancient craftsmanship passed down through generations to the present day.

In the time of Ibn Tumart, artisans used local clay to make kitchenware and flowerpots. They adorned these pottery pieces with reliefs, adding material to create volume and unique patterns.

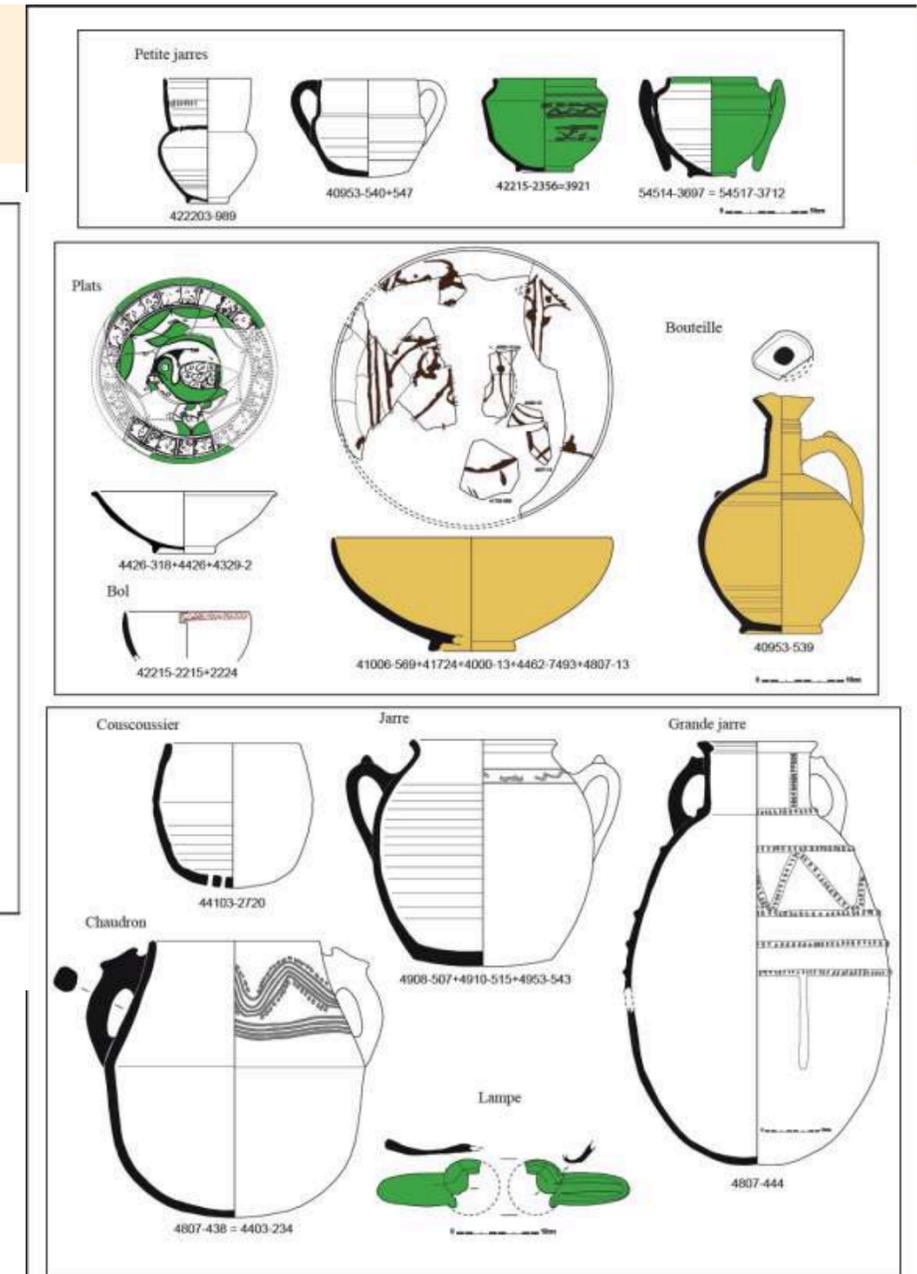
Metal furniture, such as weapons and military equipment, as well as agricultural tools, were also found. These discoveries reveal ingenious artisanal practices and showcase the diversity of Amazigh pottery.



Fig. 8 : Lot de céramique non glaçurée.

Key words

- > **Importance of Pottery** in Daily Life
- > **Local Craftsmanship** in the Valley (Carpets, Basketry)



Echantillon de la céramique médiévale découverte sur le site d'Igiliz (Mission archéologique Igiliz. ()Jean-Pierre van Staëvel, Ahmed S Ettahiri, Abdallah Fili. La montagne d'Igiliz et le pays des Arghen : Quinze ans d'archéologie rurale dans le sud du Maroc. Bulletin d'Archéologie Marocaine, 2019. fffhalshs□03481174f).



The Meeting Place of Ibn Tumart and His Disciples



After passing through the waiting room, one reaches the meeting place of Ibn Tumart and his disciples. At the center of this space stands a tree, which holds symbolic significance as, according to legend, it was here that ten of Ibn Tumart's followers pledged their loyalty to him. Ibn Tumart is said to have promised them a place in Paradise.

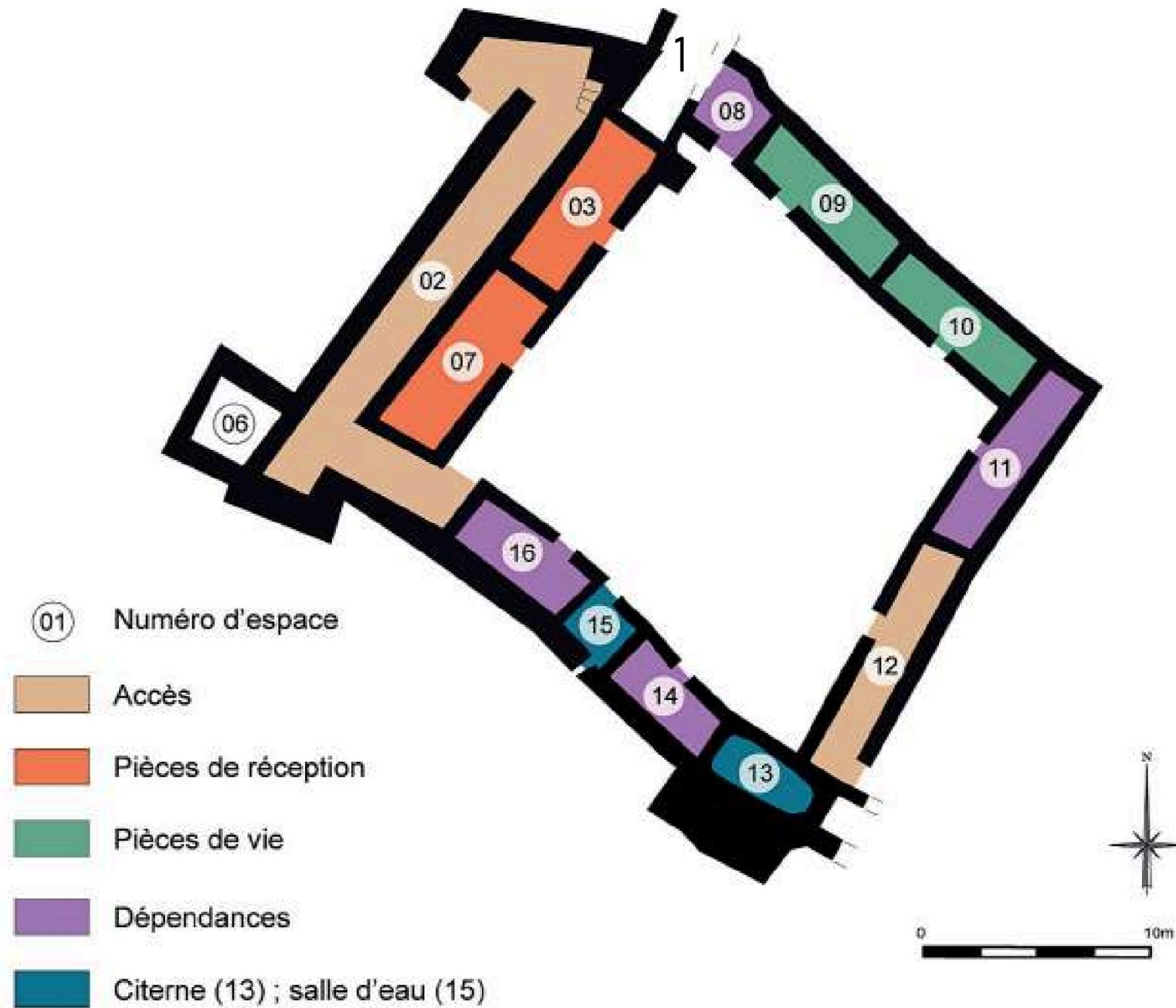
The fortress was reportedly built around this tree.

This was also the place where Ibn Tumart delivered his political speeches. A clear distinction can be seen between the command area and the living quarters. There were no toilets in this room (thus no risk of unpleasant smells) because those entering the command area were of high status. The toilets were located in the living area.

Key words

- > **Organization of Rooms** in Houses in the Valley
- > **Symbolic Role** of Trees and Gardens

Functional Interpretation of the Excavated Spaces in the Command Area of the Qasbah. Document by C. Capel, E. Rouger, and R. Schwerdtner.



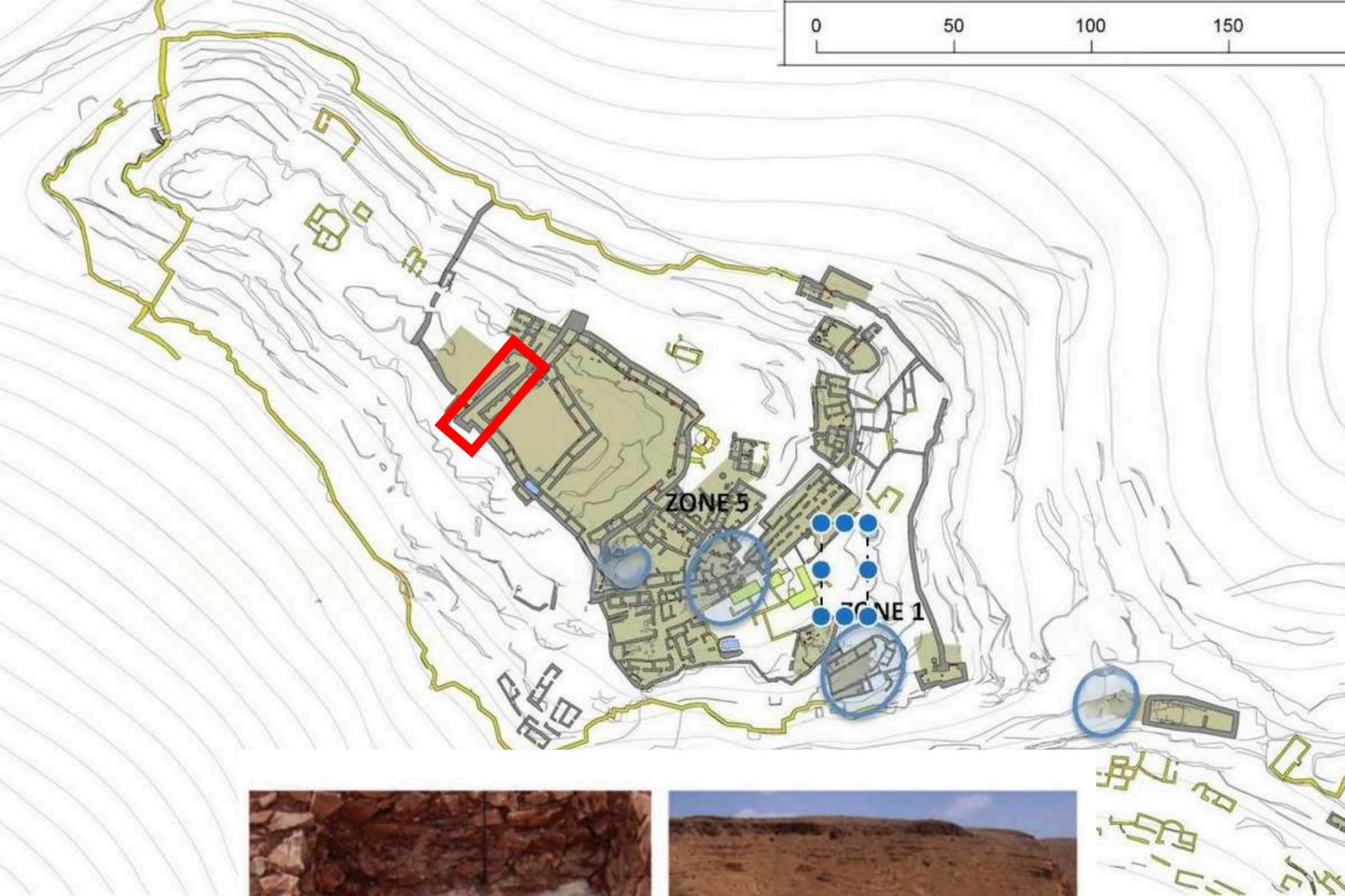
Legend

- **01:** A small room adjacent to the northeast of room 3, which, when discovered, contained ceramic materials related to storage and food preparation, accompanied by a hearth. This was therefore a kitchen.
- **07 - 03:** "Noble" areas. These are the most carefully constructed parts, dedicated to receiving guests.
- **08:** Room with a residential or utilitarian function.
- **12:** Access connecting the command area to the lower courtyard.
- **16-15-14-13:** Outbuildings, "utilitarian" rooms.

10th step

The Command Room of the Qasbah

The command area forms a residential complex with a high level of design coherence, with spaces clearly hierarchized between reception, living areas, and outbuildings. Both the architectural forms used and the material evidence and artifacts gathered during the excavation reveal a deliberate effort to distinguish and assert the social position of its inhabitants.



بيت الماء مع دكانة مخصص للفصل والوضوء مع مخرج للمياه العادمة
Pièce d'eau avec banquette pour la toilette et les ablutions
et exutoire pour l'évacuation des eaux usées



صورة عامة لغرفة الاستقبال الأساسية
Pièce de réception principale

Source : La route des Empires (application)

Key words

- > Symbolic Role of Ibn Tumart in the Dynasty
- > Role of the Leader and the King

Stop next to the water cistern. 

11th step

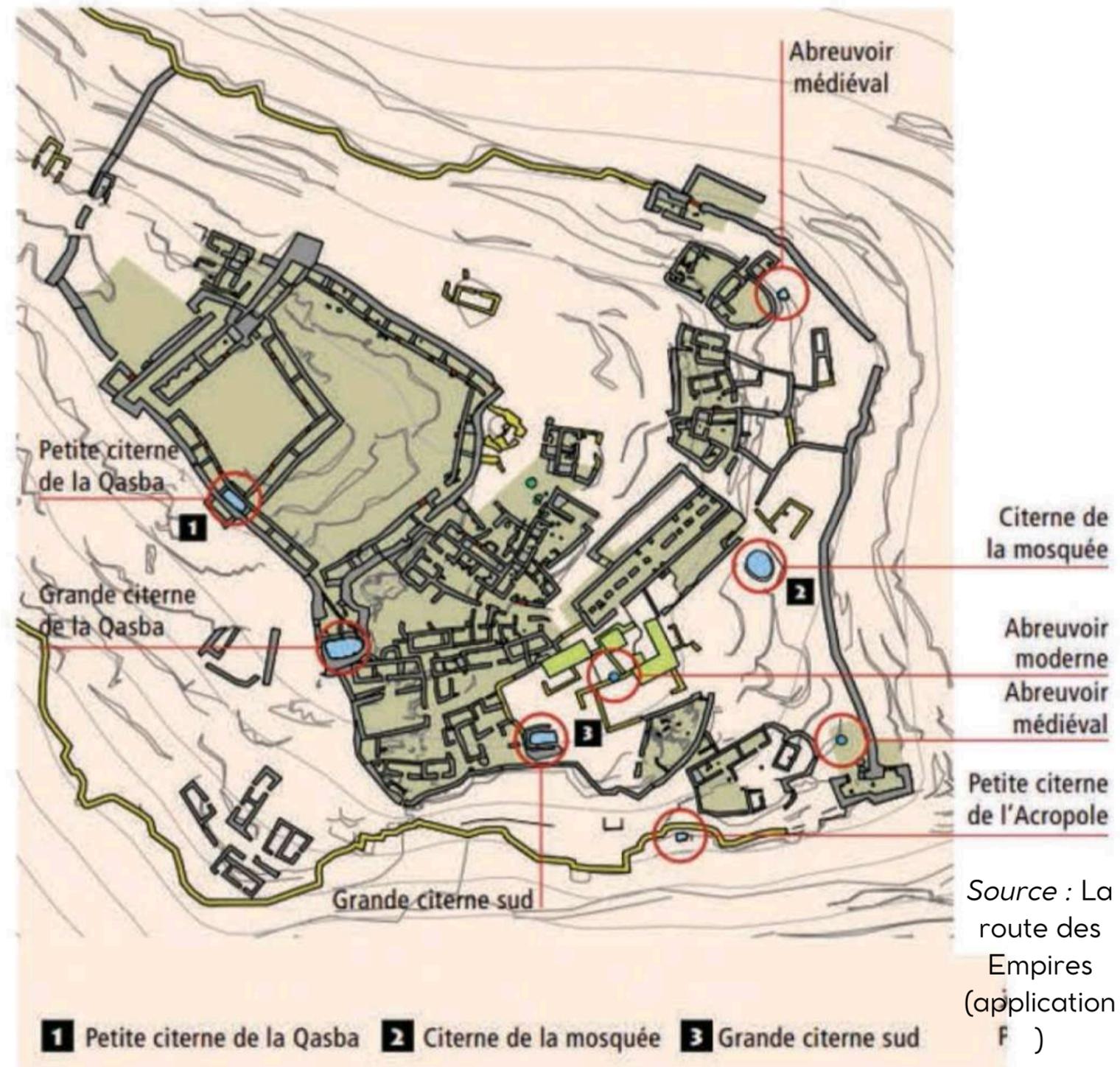
Water at Igiliz



Credits : Youssef Nidouissaiden

One of the biggest problems at Igiliz was access to water. There was no water source at the top of the mountain or on its slopes. The inhabitants therefore stored rainwater by means of cisterns equipped with settling basins.

Rainwater (or runoff) naturally flowed across the surface of the ground after rainfall. This water was collected and stored in a cistern or large reservoir designed to hold water. A structure placed next to the cistern allowed the water to be purified. This basin allowed impurities present in the water to settle at the bottom, leaving the water above clean.



Key words

- > **Water Culture** and Management in the Valley
- > **The Matfias** Rainwater Harvesting Basins
- > **Climate** Change and Its Impact on the Valley
- > **The Importance** of Water in Daily Life

12th step

The Qasbah, Center of Power of the Almohads

The Qasbah was a large residential complex reserved for a small elite and did not have a military function. It was essentially a grand house for a notable or leader. This collection of rooms was designed to impress.

The ceramic furnishings found inside the Qasbah were very diverse, with some even originating from abroad.



Source : La route des Empires (application)

Key words

- > Riads in the Valley
- > The Notables in the Valley
- > Centers of Power

13rd step

La Mahdra

The oral tradition refers to this complex as "Mhadra." It was the place where Ibn Tumart's disciples gathered to study religious sciences. The learning of the Quran was done on boards called "Tirouha." This was the first Islamic medieval university, similar to a modern university.

There was a furnace present. To wash the boards, a mixture called "ismâ" was used, composed of water and clay or sand, which effectively removed the ink, making the board ready for new writings. The boards were then placed in the sun to dry and be reused the next day.

The entire Mhadra complex consists of five rooms, a courtyard, and an ante-courtyard.

These rooms were living spaces and were used differently depending on the time of day and evening. The two areas sheltered many daily activities (with the presence of hearths, ovens, and built-in benches).

There were also latrines

Key words

- > **Quranic Schools**
- > **Learning the Quran**
- > **Traditional Madrasas in the Valley**
- > **Role of the Zaouias in the Valley**

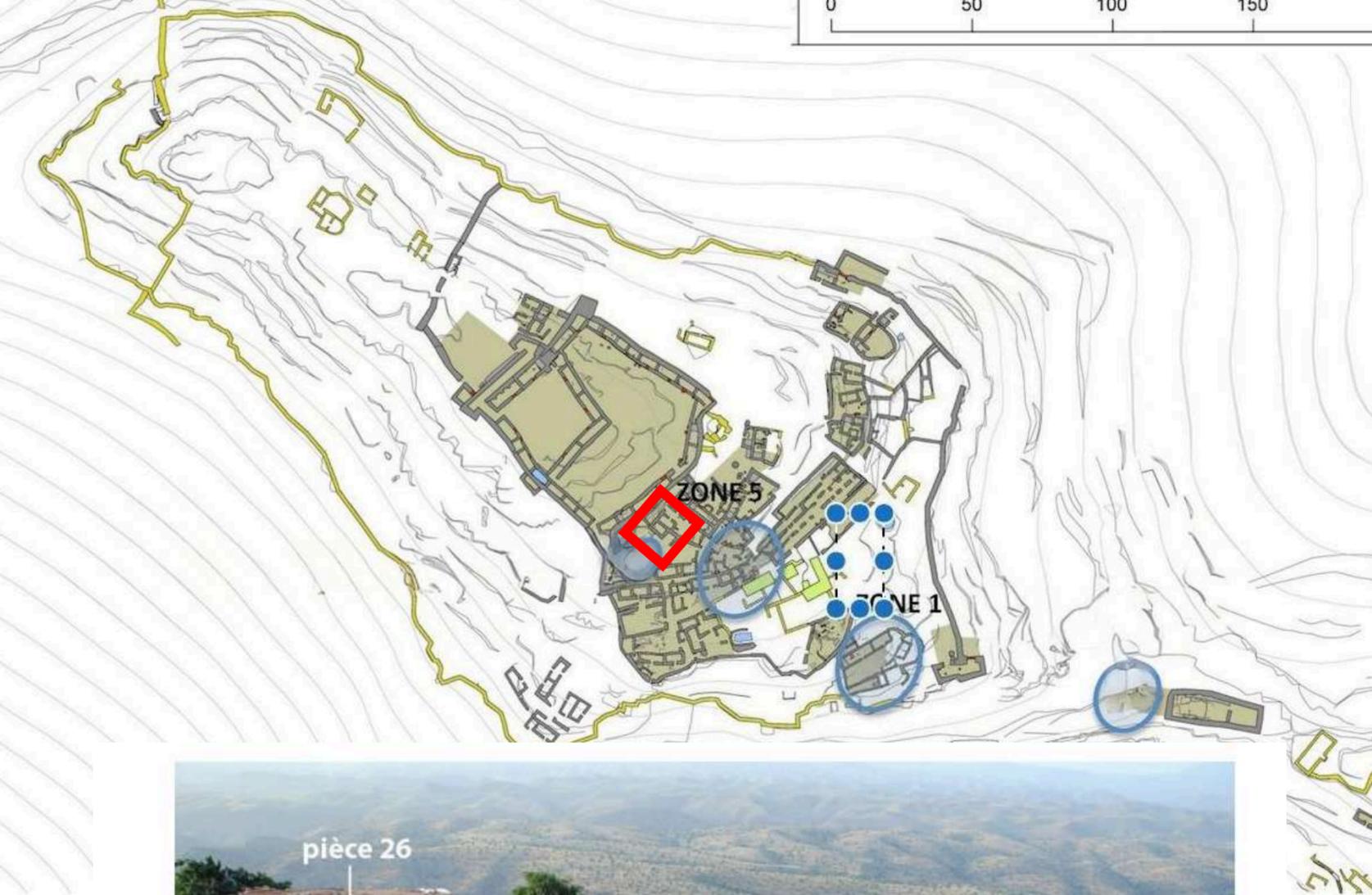


Fig. 5 : Vue générale de l'ensemble résidentiel de la Mhadra (levé/DAO : R. Schwertdner – Mission archéologique Igiliz 2011)

Map of the Mahdra

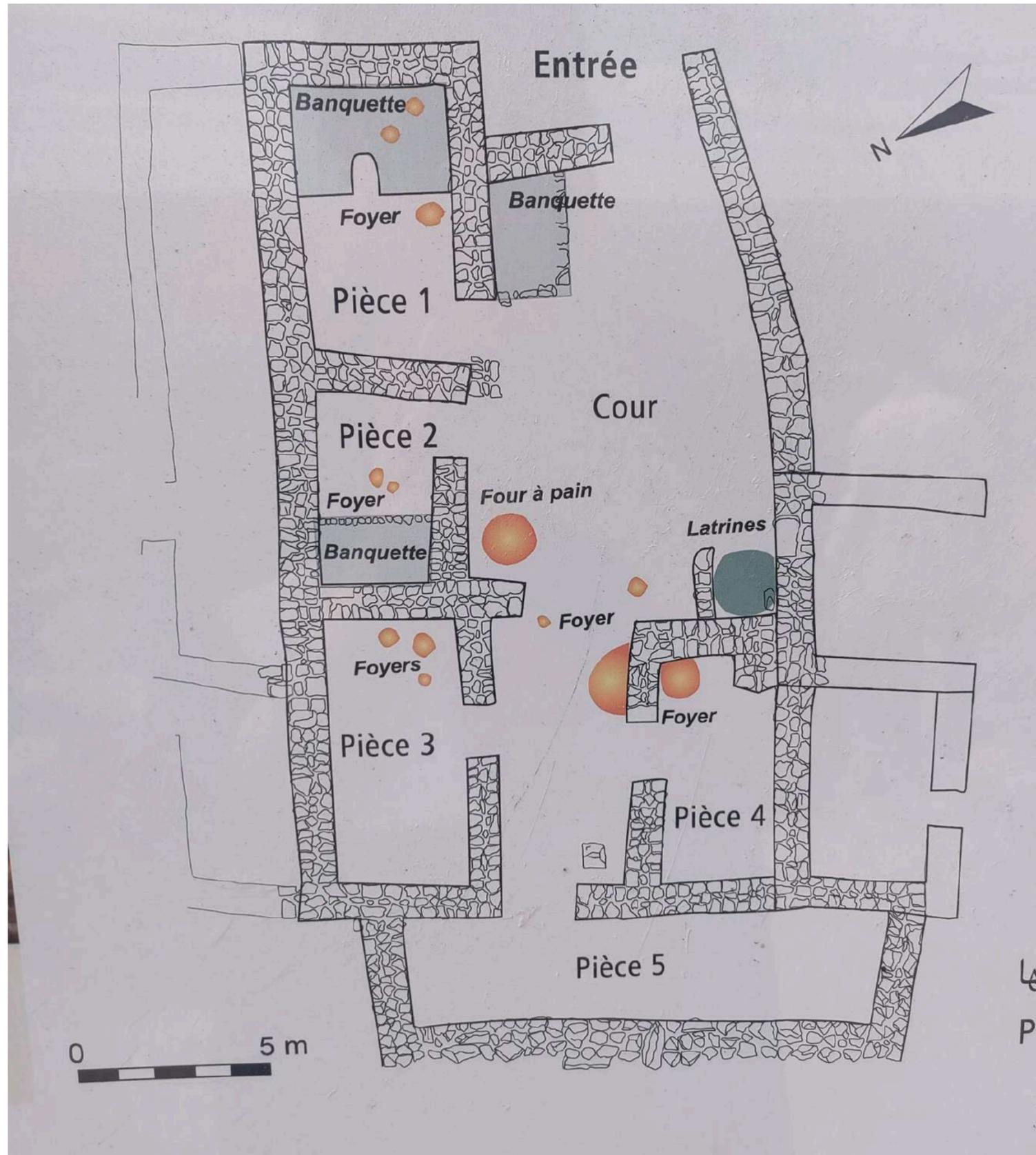


FIG. 13. – Complexe résidentiel de la Mhadra associant plusieurs pièces à une cour centrale. Les flèches indiquent les accès à l'avant-cour et aux pièces. Cliché mission archéologique Îgîlîz.

14ème étape

The cave of Ibn Tûmart

The most important monument on the site, which bears witness to the presence of Ibn Tumart, is the "sacred cave," where he came to pray. It was a place of pilgrimage for the early Almohad rulers, who would come here to meditate.

During excavations, archaeologists actually discovered three caves. However, two of them had to be sealed off, as they were at risk of collapsing. This site is considered one of the treasures of the Almohads, as it represents the heart of their civilization. However, some people misinterpreted it and came in search of a real treasure. In digging everywhere, doubts arose about the origins of the caves.

The site was therefore visited by the inhabitants of the surrounding villages for several centuries. They performed healing rituals there.

According to later sources from the 15th century, "People would take earth from the site, believing it would bring blessings, and apply it to the sick." The earth from this site thus held both religious and therapeutic significance for the locals. This is one of the reasons the archaeologists found the site in a "poor" state. Some details could not be properly analyzed, partly due to people taking stones and slabs in the late Middle Ages and early modern period, as well as "treasure hunters."



Kew words

- > The caves in the valley
- > Caves and spirituality
- > The cave of Ifri N Laajeb in Nihit
- > Legends surrounding the caves

Credits : Youssef Nidouissaiden



The "first Hegira" of Ibn Tûmart

According to historian Mehdi Ghouirgate, Ibn Tûmart's departure from Îgîlîz could be considered his "first Hegira." Much like Mohammed, who in 622 was banished from his tribe and forced to leave Mecca to seek refuge in Medina (now located in Saudi Arabia). Furthermore, his exile recalls the episode of Prophet Mohammed seeking refuge in the Cave of Hira, near Mecca.

15th step

The kitchen

The Amazigh term for a traditional bread oven is often "aqlum" (or sometimes spelled "aqlom" depending on the region). This type of oven, made of clay or terracotta, is used to bake bread traditionally in rural Amazigh areas.

Key words

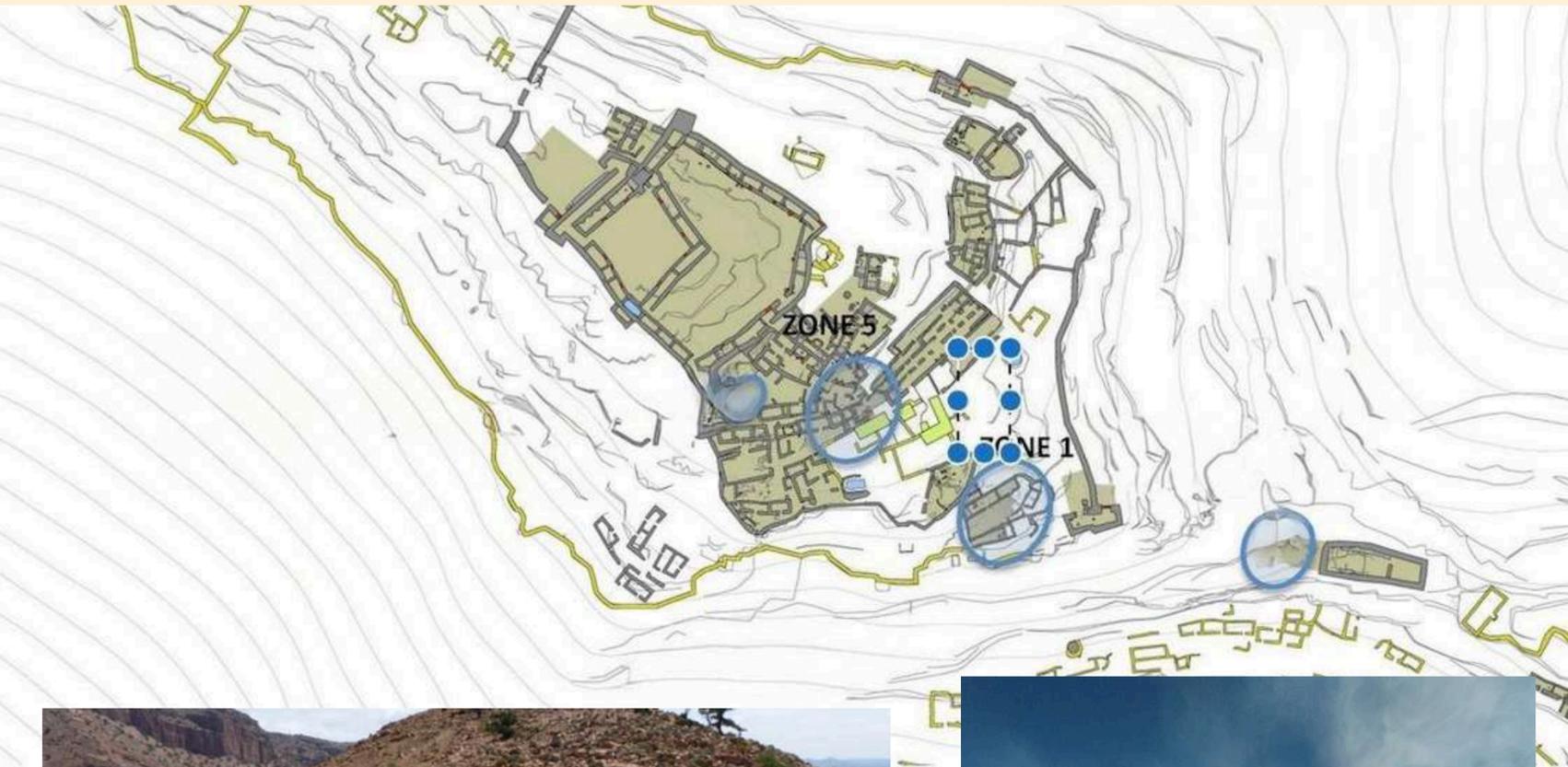
- > Local cuisine
- > Culinary art
- > Women in the valley





16th step

The tribal building or the Parliament



Several hypotheses remain regarding this room. On one hand, it is believed to have been the "medieval parliament" of Morocco. Deputies would come to discuss the progress of the Almohad movement. Leaders of 50 tribes from the Anti-Atlas would periodically come here to stay updated on the movement. On the other hand, it could also have been a stable where the visitors' horses were kept.



Source : "Essai de mesure de la capacité d'accueil du bâtiment tribal", <https://archeologie.culture.gouv.fr/fr/igiliz>.

Key words

- > Tribal management
- > The role of the Jmâa
- > The Orfs and traditional governance system

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