

# **Beni Ourtilane Region: Architecture, Civilization, and Historical Symbols - The Village of M'zien as a Model**

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## **Abstract:**

The Beni Ourtilane region comprises one hundred and seventeen villages scattered across mountain tops. These villages have preserved their traditional pattern, and each village invariably includes a mosque. The region is rich in zawiyas (Islamic religious schools and monasteries) and schools, maintaining its cultural identity and memory. It boasts significant archaeological landmarks and is characterized by a local style reflecting the living standards of its inhabitants. This region is crucial in highlighting the origins of the community and proving its identity, serving as a tangible witness with local features and characteristics dictated by nature.

The study of traditional housing holds historical and archaeological importance, showcasing human intellectual development socially, psychologically, and economically. Housing reflects the cultural aspect of an individual from all perspectives, constructed according to specific designs while considering principles, social conditions, climatic conditions, customs, and traditions according to Islam.

**Keywords:** Beni Ourtilane, architecture and urbanism, M'zien, housing, cultural and social heritage.

## **1. Introduction**

The Beni Ourtilane region is located in the northwest, ninety kilometers northwest of the Sétif province's headquarters. It is bordered by the Bejaia province to the north and northwest, Sidi Boussalam municipality to the northeast, Draa Kebila municipality to the east, Bordj Bou Arreridj province to the west, and Qenzat and Harbil municipalities to the south, and Hammam Guergour to the southeast. The average elevation of the area is 1200 meters above sea level, featuring a wet and dry climate in the summer and rainy in the winter, with an average annual rainfall and snowfall of about 700 mm.

The region has an ecological feature characterized by its high mountains covered with dense forests of various trees such as oak, cedar, and Aleppo pine. This diversity of natural vegetation has led to human settlement stability.

Beni Ourtilane is a rural, mountainous area with basic resources in modest agricultural crops like olive trees, figs, carob, some vegetables, fruits, and grains, and livestock breeding such as goats, sheep, and cattle.

The harshness of life in the region and the area's poverty have forced young people to migrate to major cities and emigrate to Europe to earn a living. Several key questions have arisen in our study of this topic. Why did residents choose mountain tops, highlands, and plateaus? Is this due to natural factors such as floods or security reasons as the primary factor for choosing these locations? How did the inhabitants deal with natural resources and adapt to customs and traditions in building traditional rural homes?

These villages consist of houses that are almost similar in shape, surrounded by walls, and their external doors open onto roads. The houses are oriented towards the east so that the sun's rays can enter the homes.

Traditional housing is simple and modest in architectural design, organized and unified in form, and most are roofed with tiles. In the villages of the region, there are usually three main entrances, and at each door, there is what is called a "Aasas."

## **2. Historical Overview of Beni Ourtilane:**

The Beni Ourtilane area (known as Ait Werthilane) has been populated since the Stone Age, as evidenced by the presence of numerous megalithic sites throughout its territory, the most significant of which is located at the summit of Djebel Dlaq (Aqouf). However, due to the lack of archaeological research, these sites have not received significant attention, and no excavations have been conducted to discover the tools used by prehistoric humans for hunting or self-defense. Similar findings have been discovered in the Guelddaman cave.<sup>1</sup>

In 2010, near the village of Bouhamza in the Sidi Aich area close to the region, due to its historical importance, tools made from animal bones and stone tools such as axes used for hunting and self-defense were found.

After transitioning from hunting and foraging to pastoralism and agriculture, the early inhabitants managed to adapt and interact with the harsh nature, forming settlements near water springs and riverbanks. The necessity of land utilization likely led them to focus on livestock breeding due to the scarcity of agricultural land in the area.

They knew the benefits of milk, derived various products from it, used animal hides for making their clothes and daily tools, ground grains with stone mills, and considered flour a staple food in their daily lives. They also made pottery from clay to preserve their provisions. In Djebel Dlaq, there

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<sup>1</sup> Farid Kherbouche - The Neolithic Tellian of Gueldaman Cave GLDI (Babors of Akbou, Algeria) VIIIth millennium BP.

is a funeral tomb known as a "Timlaline" or "grotto" with an underground funeral chamber built with varied stones.<sup>2</sup>

The archaeological evidence of human presence in the area during the Neolithic period is abundant, thanks to the archaeological survey conducted by the archaeological department's researchers.<sup>3</sup> Many lithic industries from the Neolithic period have been found on the surface in the Beni Ourtilane area.

Regarding religion, the area's early inhabitants worshipped nature and its forces, represented in phenomena, and worshipped gods inspired by their environment, such as the earth, rocks, caves, trees, and water sources. They used the caves of Azrou Yeflan as places of worship and to perform their rituals, which is a natural cave with two openings and has been historically famous since ancient times as Tifli Wezru.

Their rituals are among the most famous sacred places identified, meaning "mother of the mountain" or "guardian of the mountain and its servant." This myth may be related to the fertility goddess Imma Taklit n Wesru. In the same context, historian Ronny Bassi mentions in his book on Amazigh religion, "In addition to mountains, rocks, caves, and valleys, the Amazigh also sanctified the stars, especially the sun."<sup>4</sup>

Sidi Hassan Al-Werthilani, a traveler, considered the annual gathering of women and men in the Azrou Yeflan cave contrary to Islamic teachings, viewing it as pagan traditions practiced by the early people.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Beni Ourtilane During the Numidian Kingdoms Era

The region was part of the Western Numidian Kingdom, with boundaries extending from the north of Constantine to the Moulouya River, having Cirta (modern Constantine) as its capital. One of the most famous kings of this era was King Syphax (250 BC - 202 BC), known for his army and coinage, which represented sovereignty. In 1917, Libyco-Berber inscriptions were discovered in the Djebel Dlaq area by workers constructing a road linking Bougaa and the city of Beni Ourtilane,<sup>6</sup> evidencing the region's ancient use of Libyco-Berber script.

### 4. Beni Ourtilane in the Roman Period

Archaeological findings in the area indicate Roman settlement around Draa Kebila, Beni Ourtilane, Boussellam, and Beni Mouhli. Coins found dating back to the reign of Emperor Diocletian, who annexed these regions to the Setif Province, stretching from Saldae (modern Béjaïa) to the

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<sup>2</sup> Mohamed Ouslimane Boujoujou - The History of Northern Setif from Ancient Times to the End of the Liberation Revolution, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Field trip by the Archaeological Circle of Setif Province and the National Museum of Setif, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> René Basset - The Religion of the Berbers.

<sup>5</sup> Sidi El Houssin El Werthilani, "Nuzhat Al-Anzar Fi Fadl 'Ilm Al-Tarikh Wal-Akhbar".

<sup>6</sup> J.B Chabot, Libyco-Berber Inscriptions of the Setif Region, BHGRS, Tome II, 1941, pp. 27-34.

Ampsaga River in Mila. Numerous artifacts, including bronze coins and pottery from the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, were found in the city of Cherfa, Ain Laqraj.

A significant find was a large mortar in the village mosque, discovered during the construction of Cherfa School in 1971. In 1938, French scholar Louis Leschi unearthed a Christian church<sup>7</sup> in the Tala Oulqraj area, located on the road between Bougaa and Beni Ourtilane. A sarcophagus found in the church's atrium<sup>8</sup>, believed to belong to a 50-year-old Amazigh woman with fair skin<sup>9</sup>, possibly a nun or martyr, was analyzed by the Pasteur Institute.

The archaeological sites in Beni Ourtilane and its surroundings have suffered from neglect and looting, with most of the coins, material evidence, and pottery being plundered. Many monuments have been destroyed or used in building homes, leaving only scattered stones.

## 5. The Region During the Islamic Period

Information about the Islamic period is very scarce. After the Byzantine rule collapsed, Islamic conquests began, likely starting in the year 59 AH (678 AD), during Uqba ibn Nafi's second campaign after opening the Zab region.<sup>10</sup>

The spread of Islam was facilitated through trade, and by the late 7th century, news of battles between Muslims and Berbers led to the migration of Eastern city inhabitants. Christians fled towards the north of Sétif. The decline of paganism and Christianity, which were strongly prevalent, gradually gave way to Islam.

This situation persisted until the establishment of the Rustamid state and the allegiance to its founder, Abd al-Rahman ibn Rustam, as caliph in 761 AD, who was an adherent of the Ibadi doctrine. The region gained prominence in the Islamic era since the Hammadid period, especially being close to the Nasrid city of Béjaïa.<sup>11</sup>

However, with the onset of the 16th century, Béjaïa's prominence waned due to the Spanish occupation of the Algerian coast, leading many scholars and students to flee to the mountains, establishing villages with centers of learning like mosques, zawiyas, and schools<sup>12</sup>. The Ottoman

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<sup>7</sup> C (Charles Feraud), *Through Mauritanian Setif*, Collection of Constantine, 1863, p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> Louis Leschi, *An Archaeological Excursion in the Guergour* (Summer 1938), in *Studies of Epigraphy, Archaeology, and African History*, Paris, Arts et Métiers Graphiques, p. 344.

<sup>9</sup> *Bulletin of the Historical Geographical Society of the Setif Region*, p. 164.

<sup>10</sup> Djilali (Abderrahmane Mohammed), *General History of Algeria Vol 1*, 4th Edition, Dar Al-Thaqafa, Beirut, 1982, p. 128.

<sup>11</sup> Nadhor Rachid, *The History of the Greater Maghreb: Its Historical, Civilizational, and Political Foundations*, Dar Al-Nahda Al-Arabiya, Beirut, 198, pp. 247-248.

<sup>12</sup> Ahmed Dherif, *Reading in the Journey, Tourism in the Depths of El Werthilani's Journey*, Association of Pen People, Dar Houma Printing, 2005, p. 15.

presence was mainly in Constantine, with officials collecting taxes <sup>13</sup>and quelling local revolts until the beginning of the French occupation.<sup>14</sup>

## 6. The French Occupation

The Beni Ourtilane area, like the rest of the country, resisted French colonization from its onset, participating in various popular resistances. Some instances include:

- Many inhabitants defended the city of Sétif against the French invaders on December 15, 1838.
- A popular resistance in 1842 led by Ahmed Aghboulin was suppressed by the colonizers under General Bugeaud.
- In 1851, residents of Beni Ourtilane participated in the popular resistance led by Bou Baghla.
- In 1871, Sheikh Mokrani and Sheikh Haddad united for a new resistance, joined by the tribes of Beni Ourtilane<sup>15</sup>. The area suffered from the atrocities of French colonialism, including various forms of torture, killing, displacement, destruction, and burning of villages. It was classified as a forbidden zone, with many elders, children, and women executed without mercy or compassion.

### 6.1 Urban Development in the Beni Ourtilane Area

The Beni Ourtilane area consists of one hundred and seventeen villages scattered across its mountain peaks, slopes, plateaus, valleys, and ravines. These villages maintain their traditional style, housing over one hundred and forty-three mosques and zawiyas (Islamic religious schools and monasteries), from which the call to prayer resonates five times a day, signaling a community rich in knowledge and education.

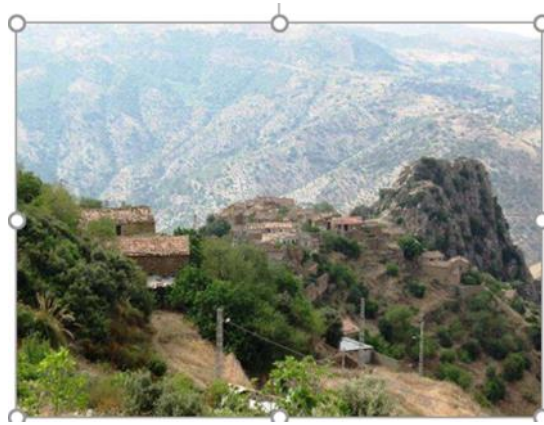
Many scholars have emerged from these villages, dedicating their lives to serving their faith, country, and people, becoming beacons of wisdom across generations. Every village boasts scholars and jurists in Islamic jurisprudence and Arabic language sciences, including syntax, morphology, rhetoric, and eloquence, with their number exceeding three hundred scholars, imams, and teachers, making the area a hub of scholars for neighboring states and even the capital.

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<sup>13</sup> Sidi El Houssin El Werthilani, "Nuzhat Al-Anzar Fi Fadl 'Ilm Al-Tarikh Wal-Akhbar", 2nd Edition, Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi, Beirut, Lebanon, 2011, p. 200.

<sup>14</sup> Servier (Jean), *The Berbers*, 2nd Edition, Algiers, Ed Dahleb, 1990, pp. 41-65.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Mohamed Tayeb Aqab, Dr. Khadija Nashar Khadija, Aicha Hanafi, *Journal of Antiquities* Issue 12, Year 2015, p. 75.



**Image 1: One of the Villages in the Beni Ourtilane Area**

Beni Ourtilane<sup>16</sup> refers to a district encompassing four municipalities: Beni Ourtilane, Ain Laqraj, Beni Chebana, and Beni Mouhli, situated in the extreme northwest.

### **7. Village of M'zien**

The village of M'zien, one of the villages of Beni Ourtilane, has not been extensively studied before and is typically named after the tribe or family residing in it or its geographical location, such as Ait (tribe) or Draa (arm). However, M'zien is distinguished by its name, derived from its breathtaking natural beauty, as "M'zien" linguistically signifies beauty and splendor.

Located 6 km west of the municipal headquarters on an unpaved colonial-era road, this steep and winding road leads directly to the village amidst a dense pine forest, defining the natural boundary between the Sétif and Bejaia provinces. It is bordered by the villages of Ouerir Yiloune, L'ghrib, Sidi Saad, Berk, to the north, and by the village of Friha to the west, with L'khouabi, Ait Moussa, and Mouton to the southwest, and Ighil Malik and Tizi Ouatou to the east. The village sits at an elevation of 1000 meters above sea level.<sup>17</sup>



**Image 2: The Beauty of M'zien Village**

<sup>16</sup> Ahmed Dherif, Previous Reference, pp. 15-20.

<sup>17</sup> The name "Senatus consulte" of 1899 refers to a tribe residing in the area, descended from a common ancestor named Werthilan, according to Google Earth.

M'zien is distinguished by its mountainous environment, built on a sharply protruding rock ledge that adds to its charm, especially with its steep edges. Its inhabitants are known as the descendants of Sidi El Touati, the founder, who sought refuge from Spanish persecution imposed on Bejaia.

Its significant ancient landmarks, particularly religious ones, include its mosque, zawiya, and Quranic school, which were completely demolished and rebuilt post-independence, along with a facility for travelers.

The civil architecture comprises twenty-four alleys divided into three neighborhoods inhabited by three families, built closely together, with a single road running from top to bottom, east to west, designed to minimize sunlight exposure and regulate air flow,<sup>18</sup> branching into paths leading to the village's orchards.

This small village is the third to maintain Quran memorization and Islamic science teaching from generation to generation.<sup>19</sup>



**Image 3: Closely Packed and Aligned Houses**

The traditional rural and tribal society structure adheres to tribal and clan patterns with tightly knit and interconnected residential and social units forming the community.

## **8. Rural Housing**

Typically contains an extended family under a patriarchal system comprising children of the same father.<sup>20</sup>

## **9. The Alley (Neighborhood)**

Consists of rooms opening onto a courtyard known as "Takhemmin" (plural of "Akhm"), with a main entrance including the grandfather, father, and married grandchildren, sometimes housing 20 to 60 individuals.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Hamlaoui Ali: Examples of Palaces from the Laghouat Region, a Historical Archaeological Study, National Fund for the Promotion of Arts, Artistic Printing Foundation, Algeria, 2006, p. 65.

<sup>19</sup> Ait Algitt Mohamed Taher: Zawiyas of the Kabylie Region, Minbar Al-Imam Anas bin Malik Journal, Issue 5, Dar Al-Huda, Ain M'lila, 2003, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Boutefnouchet (Mostafa), The Algerian Family: Evolution and Recent Characteristics, Algiers, SNED, 1980, p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> Boutefnouchet (Mostafa), op. cit., p. 38.

- **Social Structure of the Kabylie Region**
- **The Family Unit ("Thadarat"<sup>22</sup>):**

Over time, the extended family branches into several extended families due to marriage, kinship, and growth, forming larger and more complex social units.

## **10. The Tribe ("Arch"):**

Encompasses a group of villages tracing back to a common ancestor, with each tribe having its own boundaries and properties.

## **11. Village Components**

The choice of location influences the village's future layout; it may be circular if the mountain peak is wide or narrow and elongated if the peak is slender, as is the case with M'zien, where only a single path allows for pedestrian and animal traffic.

### **1. The Main Mosque**

Located at the village's center and highest point, overseeing the entire population, it holds great importance as one of the oldest congregational mosques in the area, hosting the five daily prayers, Friday prayers,<sup>23</sup> and Eid prayers. Its establishment in the 11th century Hijri<sup>24</sup> by Sidi El Touati of Bejaia led to the foundation of a zawiya that thrived for about three centuries and was renowned for its education.



**Image 4: The Main Mosque in the Center of the Village, Alongside the Traveler's House and School**

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<sup>22</sup> Mahdjoubi (Lamine), For an Improved Rural Housing to Limit Distress Migration, Dissertation Submitted for the Degree of M.Phil in Urban Planning Design, Newcastle, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1985, pp. 06-09.

<sup>23</sup> Golvin (L), The Mosque: Its Origins, Morphology, Various Functions, and Role in Muslim Life, Especially in North Africa, Algiers, 1960, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> Werthilani (Hussein bin Mohammed Al-Sharif), Previous Source, pp. 9-60.



The mosque has three facades, with the qibla (direction of prayer) facade being the most significant. It is bordered by the traveler's house to the northwest, the main street to the southwest, and the adjacent residential compound to the southeast.

## **2. The Zawiya:**

A zawiya is known as one of the Islamic institutions of the village, also called Tamemrart<sup>25</sup>, which is neither purely a zawiya nor a ribat. It specializes in teaching and memorizing the Quran and is widespread across many smaller tribes.

Dr. Yahia Bouaziz described these institutions as cultural establishments similar to Quranic schools (kuttab) and sometimes zawiya, prevalent in the rural and mountainous villages of Algeria, especially in the Kabylie region of eastern Algeria.<sup>26</sup>

## **3. M'zien School:**



**Image 5: M'zien School Today**

## **4. Definition of a School:**

Linguistically, the term is derived from the verb 'darasa' (to study), meaning to review and repeat for mastery.<sup>27</sup> Technically, a school is a religious building without a minaret or pulpit, designated for Quranic recitation and providing lodging for students, jurists, and sheikhs.<sup>28</sup>

Located north of the main mosque and the traveler's lodge, not far from them, it was destroyed in 1956 by French colonizers and rebuilt immediately after independence, covering an area of 30 square meters.

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<sup>25</sup> Azouq Abdelkrim, *Islamic Archaeological Monuments in Bejaia and Its Surroundings*, Dissertation for the Doctorate in Islamic Archaeology, Institute of Archaeology, University of Algiers, 2007-2008.

<sup>26</sup> Yahia Bouaziz, *Conditions of Cultural Institutions in Algeria during the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Journal of Culture, Issue 63, Ministry of Culture, 1981, pp. 11.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Maqrizi, Taqi ad-Din, *The Admonitions and Reflections by Surveying the Scenes and Events*, Vol. 3, Dar Al-Tahrir Wal-Nashr, 1967-1968, pp. 313-314.

<sup>28</sup> *The Intermediate Arabic Lexicon*, 2nd Edition, 1975, pp. 279-280.

## 5. Housing in the Village of M'zien:

**Definition of Housing:** It is a collection of interconnected rooms forming a residential unit within a larger structure,<sup>29</sup> inhabited regardless of its shape or style.<sup>30</sup> Traditionally, in North Africa, housing has undergone significant developments and evolved over the ages, as shown by archaeological findings, influenced by successive civilizations.

## 6. Parts of the House:

The traditional house is a construction built according to various technical rules within specific frameworks, belonging to the type of simple, rectangular houses, with reduced height in snowy areas<sup>31</sup>. It consists of the following sections:

### 7. The Skifa (Lobby):

An architectural element known since the early Islamic ages in most parts of the Islamic world. Locally known as "Asqif," architecturally, it's the space between the main entrance of the alley or individual house (Thaburth) and the courtyard (Amraḥ or Afrāq), usually rectangular or square, with stone benches known as "Idannen or Tasdiriyin" to block the view into the courtyard. Water jars are hung on its walls to cool with the air currents. The roof is flat, topped with a special guest room known as "Taghrifet."

### 8. The Courtyard:

A locally named open space defined by walls or buildings, its function is to cool down temperatures and allow cold air currents to refresh the area in summer and let sunlight in during winter for warmth. The courtyard is the symbol of life and the distinctive link of all Islamic architecture, the heart of the building,<sup>32</sup> and the vital core of authentic housing.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ghalib Abdul Rahman, *Encyclopedia of Islamic Architecture*, Vol. 01, Beirut, Lebanon, 1988, p. 358.

<sup>30</sup> Aqab Mohamed Tayeb, *The Traditional Housing in the Lesser Kabylie Region*, *Annals of the National Museum of Ancient Archeology*, Issue 12-2002, p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> Maunier (R), *The Collective Construction of the House in Kabylie*, Paris, 1929, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> Joudi Mohamed Hussein, *Arab-Islamic Architecture and Its Characteristics and Effects in Syria*, *Publications of the Ministry of Culture*, Damascus, 1974, p. 43.

<sup>33</sup> Aqab Mohamed Tayeb, *Glimpses of Islamic Architecture and Arts in Algeria*, Zahraa Al-Sharq Library, 1990, p. 106.



**Image 6: The Lobby, a Place for Cooling Water in Jars**



**Image 7: The Flat Roof of the Lobby**

In authentic housing, windows and doors open onto it, providing the interior space with air, light, and the unique solid rock nature of M'zien village. Stone basins filled with soil are planted with grapevines and fig trees, which cool the air in summer and achieve architectural and natural harmony.



**Image 8: The Newly Created Basin for Planting Trees**

## **9. Taghrifet:**

This section has several names, and Taghrifet is a room designated for the house's inhabitants where they carry out their daily activities. It occupies 2/3 of the total area, with the floor raised slightly

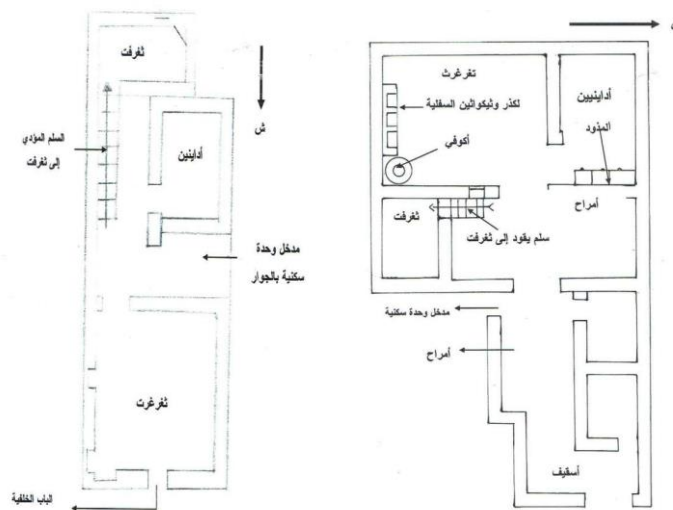
above the main door's threshold (Amenar or Idbizar) by about twenty centimeters. This space is dedicated to the daily activities of humans.

### 10. Adainin (Stable):

Designated for animals, occupying the remaining third of the space in Akham, this section is lower than the Taghrifet and separated by a half-wall with gaps for the owner to watch over the tethered animals. The floor is sloped, and this livestock is considered a symbol of wealth.<sup>34</sup>

### 11. Ta'arishet:

A space directly above Adainin, with horizontal dimensions matching those of Adainin but with a lower height. Accessed from the courtyard, its primary function is to store provisions, bedding, and valuables of the inhabitants, located directly above Adainin.



**Figure 1: Ground Floor Plan of the Traditional House ; Figure 2: Upper Floor Plan (Preliminary Sketch)**

## 12. Appendices of the Traditional House

### A. The Staircase:

It plays an important role in multi-story houses as a vital means of connecting the floors, taking various forms, including spiral staircases that twist around themselves and straight staircases with right-angle bends, used since ancient times and focused on functionality rather than aesthetics.<sup>35</sup>

### B. Thaburth:

It serves as the main entrance to the house and the sole door for communication between the outside and inside. It is known by various names in different regions, such as Thaburth Akham (the

<sup>34</sup> Azouq Abdelkrim, Previous Reference, p. 118.

<sup>35</sup> Violet (le Duc), Dictionary of Architecture and Archaeology, Pierre Mardaga, Brussels, 1979, pp. 146-147.

house's door) and Thaburth Tasharqit, indicating that architectural design considered health aspects, as most doors face east to allow sufficient sunlight in.<sup>36</sup>

### **C. Amnar:**

It is the threshold that separates the interior and exterior environments of the house, acting as a barrier to prevent water from entering the house.<sup>37</sup>

## **13. Household Equipment of the Kabyle Home**

The Kabyle home contains many tools used in daily life, including:

### **A. Lakdar:**

Generally found on the wall opposite Adainin, it is a high ledge, about 50 cm wide and rectangular, where a lamp is placed high to illuminate the entire house. It contains niches and rectangular shelves ending in arches used to store essentials for cooking, such as pots and small jars for oil and butter, with a stove nearby.



**Image 9: Lakdar with a lamp above**

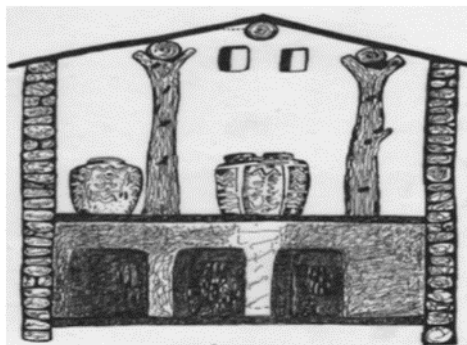


**Image 10: Lakdar with a shelf above and a cupboard beside<sup>38</sup>**

<sup>36</sup> Missoum (S), A Berber House in the Village of Ait-Lachen, Algiers, p. 131.

<sup>37</sup> Bourdieu (P), The Practical Sense, Ed de Minuit, Paris, 1985, p. 459.

<sup>38</sup> Pictures taken from the residence of Guejik Abdelrazak in 1999.



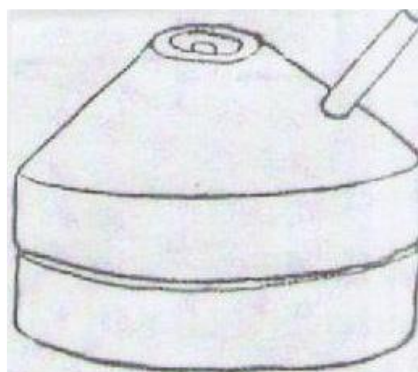
**Figure 2: The element of Lakdar with its openings and the ceiling<sup>39</sup>**

**B. Akoufi:**

A large jar for storing grains like wheat and barley, placed on both sides of Lakdar, made of burnt clay, with an opening at the bottom for dispensing grains and checking supplies.<sup>40</sup> These small or large household pottery items are crafted by women.<sup>41</sup>

**C. Taserth or Blat:**

A stone device, or more accurately, a mill for grinding dry grains.



**Figure 3: The mill<sup>42</sup>**

**D. Azat:**

A set of tools used in the manufacture of covers, mattresses, and rugs.

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<sup>39</sup> Sonia Nougui, M'zien Village, an Archaeological Study, Dissertation for the Master's Degree, 2011-2012.

<sup>40</sup> Basagana and Saysd, Traditional and Family Structures in Kabylie, p. 24.

<sup>41</sup> Missoum (S), op. cit., p. 130.

<sup>42</sup> Vicente (C), The Dwelling in Grande Kabylie (Algeria), in the Notebook of Arts and Techniques of North Africa, No. 05.



**Image 11: Mr. Guejik Abdelrazak**

### **E. The Kanoun:**

A circular pit used for lighting fires, surrounded by three stones on which the pot is placed and also used for heating.

Studying traditional housing is of historical and archaeological importance because it illustrates all the historical phases and the nature of human intellectual development socially, psychologically, and economically. The architecture of the house, with all its elements and sections, represents the living space, reflecting the cultural aspect of the individual in all aspects. It was constructed according to a specific design, considering the fundamental, social, and climatic conditions, customs, and traditions according to Islam.

### **14. Building Materials in Traditional Architecture**

The village's current location was influenced by various factors, including topography and climate, with natural resources provided by the surrounding environment, some requiring transformation.

#### **A. Stone:**

One of the primary materials relied upon by villagers for building their homes, available in abundance. Stones were cut into various sizes and sometimes used in their natural state to fit the construction process.<sup>43</sup>

#### **B. Wood:**

Sourced from forests, wood is an organic material composed of fibers and cells containing organic matter and water, fundamentally consisting of carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen.<sup>44</sup> It is widely used in the region and holds a significant place in construction and as fuel for both nomads and urban dwellers<sup>45</sup>. Used for spears, arrows, roofing, closures, etc.,<sup>46</sup> it was employed in village buildings as

<sup>43</sup> Khnafar Younes, *Technological Foundations in the Use of Decoration*, p. 23.

<sup>44</sup> Olivier (E), *Technology Materials of Construction*, T 2, 5th Ed, Paris, 1976, p. 17.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Book of Lessons and the Chronicle of the Arabs and Non-Arabs*, Dar Al-Kitab Al-'Ilmiyya, Lebanon, 1959, p. 727.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *The Same Source*, pp. 324-325.

pillars, roof supports, beams, and rafters, primarily using pine and oak trees abundant in the Beni Ourtilane area.



**Image 12: Various uses of wood in M'zien village**

**Terracotta:** Consists of fired clay available in several shapes, such as rectangular, semicircular, or cylindrical with one side narrower than the other<sup>47</sup>, used for roofing with a light red color.

#### **C. Mortar:**

Used in construction, it is a fine powder mixture of lime, sand, red brick powder, furnace ash, and is an essential building material that protects the construction from moisture and serves as insulation.

Other materials like plaster, lime, iron, cane, and local *Ampelodesmes* (also called *Esparto grass*), woven into mats called 'shakwa' used for roofing to prevent dust infiltration, are also utilized.



**Image 13: A roof made of Ampelodesmes**

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<sup>47</sup> Ghalib Abdul Rahim, *Encyclopedia of Islamic Architecture*, Beirut, Vol. 1, 1988, p. 314.





**Image 14: The shape of terracotta tiles**

### 15. The Ethnographic and Cultural Civilizational Aspect

The region boasts a rich and diverse civilizational heritage, represented by villages and hamlets that many continue to fight against the ravages of time due to human factors, such as complete migration caused by harsh nature and the lack of essential life facilities. This village has a significant cultural heritage, including an oil press and an essential cultural aspect. Formerly, students who memorized the Quran were honored with a decorated wooden plaque and celebrated in the village with a grand procession.



**Image 15: Decorated Wooden Plaque<sup>48</sup>**

Regarding religious rituals, the residents paid attention to every detail, bringing from the Hejaz a vessel known as "Al-Madd," considered an invaluable archaeological treasure.



**Image 16: Al-Madd<sup>49</sup>**

<sup>48</sup> Decorated wooden panel preserved in the Beni Ourtilane Museum.

<sup>49</sup> A vessel known as the Prophet's Madd, preserved in the Beni Ourtilane Museum.

Area as a whole has not benefited from academic studies and historical research, especially concerning manuscripts because the region, a land of knowledge and scholars, has left many manuscripts in the treasures of some families.



**Image 17: Rare Manuscripts in Some Ourtilanian Families**



**Image 18: Utensils of Various Types Used in Daily Life (Photographed at the Beni Ourtilane Museum)**



**Image 19: Traditional Shoes**



**Image 20: Boxes for Storing Belongings (Photos from the Beni Ourtilane Museum)**

### **Conclusion:**

Architecture is one of the most significant indicators of human progress and evolution and a testament to their struggle with harsh environments to protect their families from climatic influences while catering to their personal needs. Humans have tirelessly worked to meet their needs using simple means from nature itself, gradually fulfilling them. Architectural art is the most important and oldest of the arts.

Humans have lived with architectural development through the ages and adapted it for their benefit. In the architecture of M'zien village, humans have found solutions to adapt and acclimate to this nature. Despite its simplicity, the architecture has left behind art and forms in house design, roofing techniques, and the orientation of doors and windows. Additionally, the cultural heritage created by this vast amount of pottery materials, agricultural tools, whether wooden, iron, or stone, such as oil presses, which were the lifeline of the village, has now become an invaluable cultural heritage, if not considered priceless artifacts.