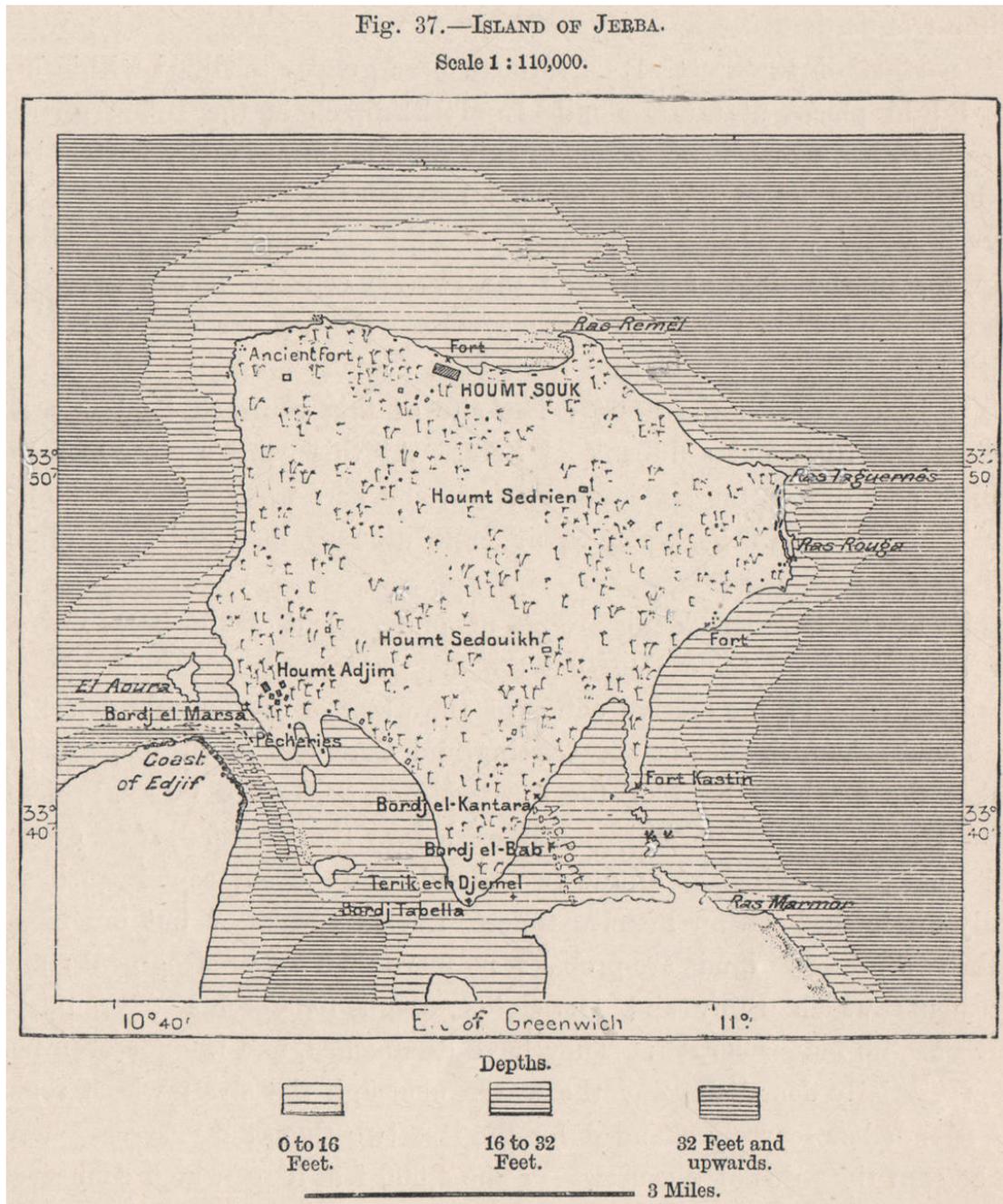


De-fencing the Mosque

Investigation into rural religious edifices and settlements of Djerba Island

(Traveling Studio: Sept 30 - Oct 5)

Faculty: **Ziad Jamaledine** (L.E.F.T Architects), Teaching Assistant: **Alex Odom**



Studio Schedule:

Travel to Tunisia: Sept 30 to Oct 5

Midterm Review: Oct 25

Final Review: Dec 10

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Djerba, a Mediterranean island defined by three overlapping landscapes:

The island of Djerba, situated in the south of the gulf of Gabes off the southeastern shores of modern Tunisia, has been ecologically and economically shaped by three landscapes: **(1) a geological** landscape that, through underwater trenches and shallow waters, has formed the 514 square kilometer island into a physical continuation of the Saharan mainland. The island soil is sandy with soft and hard layers of limestone rocks, which have been used as building material. **(2) a maritime** economic landscape, wherein Djerba is located as part of a constellation of islands in the Mediterranean Sea. A historical center of olive oil production, Djerba's agricultural economy has shaped much of its open terrain. **(3)** And a **geographical** landscape that situated the island along the northern African shore frontier (Afriqia) of the Mediterranean Sea. In the last half century, the island's shore — a historical front of confrontation and exchange with Europe is turned into a site for tourism, with large scale hotel development invading the island's fragile eastern coastline.

Dispersed historical rural mosques across densely packed rural settlements:

Throughout the medieval and early modern periods, the island of Djerba was a refuge for two coexisting minority populations: the **Muslim Ibadi** community and the **Jewish** community. The Menzel, or State, constituted the main rural settlement for those communities, providing a hub around which religious, social and agriculture components were organized. The space of the **Menzel** unit is composed of the houche (extended family courtyard house), the ghaba (olive grove fed by a local well), the cistern (including a rain water harvesting basin), and the workshop. Spread across the cluster of packed rural settlements is a vast network of small mosques (more than 300) with **learning, water infrastructure** and **defensive** functions. From a belt of fortified coastal mosques to underground mosques to inland madarasa-mosques, these austere, white washed structures were the product of a religious practice that prohibited the building of large congregation Friday mosques, resulting in the lack of an urban center on the island for centuries. Also blending in Djerba's rural landscape are more than 20 small (equally austere) synagogues, including Al Ghriba, a pilgrimage site of similar prominence to the Holy Land.

The arrival of the Ottomans in the 17th century and the French colonial powers in the 19th century prompted and then spurred the growth of the first city, **Houmt Souk**, on the northern tip of the island. Urban migration to the city, whose form is clustered around its market and an Ottoman Friday mosque, has caused the abandonment of rural living and the desertion of vast numbers mosques across Djerba's flat landscape.

Djerba's 300 mosques, and other religious structures:

This shift — the abandonment of historical mosques, the vanishing rural Menzels and the movement of the 'Sunnified' population towards a growing urban center — coupled with the emergence of an international beach and religious tourism industries, and an influx of a new transient population, posit a set of spatial and ecological challenges to the island.

Operating at multiple scales, the studio will revisit Djerba's mosques (and synagogues) as an architectural entry point towards addressing those territorial concerns, identifying critical sites of interventions, and re-inventing alternative model(s) of settlement, that would bolster the resilience of the local communities, while fulfilling their spiritual needs.

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