

The Right to the (dual)City

An investigation into the Islamic/Colonial Dual City model and its evolution into the 21st century

Columbia University, GSAPP
A4105-16 / Fall 2022 Advanced Studio V

Faculty: Ziad Jamaledidine

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The Right to the (dual)City, an investigation into Tunis Islamic/Colonial Dual City model and its evolution into the 21st century

(Traveling Studio: Oct 13 – Oct 20)

Faculty: Ziad Jamaledine (L.E.FT Architects)

Working partner:

Dr. Iheb Guermazi: Architect, architectural historian

Local consultants:

Adnen Ben Nejma: Architect, Expert at the National Heritage Institute

Adnan Ghali: Association Sauvegarde de la Madina (ASM)

Studio scope and structure:

The studio will investigate the architectural, urban, and landscape capacities of Tunis's current hybrid Islamic/Colonial core. This project aims to map, identify, and propose a physical intervention and accompanying program for the interstitial spaces of Tunis's medieval Islamic city medina and the French colonial quarter (Ville Nouvelle) that surrounds it. Interventions will be proposed after critically analyzing the historical evolution of the dual city and probing the relationship of the districts to their environments (political, natural, urban, and infrastructural).

Students will attend studio lectures on the history of Islamic architecture and will conduct workshops with scholars of and experts in Islamic architecture.

In October, the studio will travel to Tunis, Tunisia.



Skeins of cotton hanging to dry in dyers souk. 1958 - George Rodger

The Dual City Colonial Model:

Around the turn of the 20th century, French colonial power switched from a brutal and ineffective strategy of the “assimilation” of its North African subjects to one based on a softer method of “association.” At the urban level, the “assimilation” strategy, which violently tried to convert local Arab communities into a European cultural model, resulted in the demolition of the historic dense urban fabric and the institution of a gridded, militarized city in its place. The “association” strategy, in contrast, called for an urban preservation approach that aimed to conserve the Arab-Islamic culture, and delegated control via local elites as a means of stabilizing colonial domination.¹

Under this new philosophy of preservation, the French Colonial eye viewed the 7th century Medina of Tunis as a scenographic entity that displayed an exotic Islamic culture: viewed as unchanged for centuries, it was manifested through a disorderly urban fabric, congested vernacular architecture, and mysterious inhabitants concealed behind the blank city wall.

To further emphasize the contrast between the historic (supposed backward) and the modern (supposed civilized), the old Medina was preserved and a modern city, Ville Nouvelle, an orderly enclave for French immigrants (and later wealthy Arab families), was built alongside it. In contrast to the Medina, the gridded street blocks of the French enclave are properly zoned, lined with boulevards, squares and gardens, a market place, an opera house, a church, the French governor's residence, and have modern amenities such as a tramway, and sewage and electricity. Ville Nouvelle is a powerful metropolis whose economic and political strength is manifested through space, buildings, and infrastructure.

1. See: Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (The University of Chicago Press, 1991), chapters one and two



This preservation philosophy, blind to the environmental and sociological qualities of the Medina, set strict physical regulations on its streets and monuments: freezing it in time and depriving it of vital urban activities. The 7th century Zaytuna mosque, originally a regional educational center integrated in the socio-economic fabric of the Medina, has been reduced to a strictly liturgical function, its social and educational capacities delegated to the modernizing city beyond the Medina's wall. The Medina has also been detached from its historical territories. The surrounding open agricultural land that supported it has been occupied and the sacred cemeteries outside its walls have been built over.

The Ville Nouvelle has transformed the landscape and the geography of the Medina, re-orienting it to the Western continent. Initially, the Medina opened to the sea via the Sea Gate (Bab al-Bahar). Renamed the "Porte France" by colonial authorities, the gate now leads to the French Boulevard, pass the cross-bearing cardinal Lavigerie statue (archbishop of Carthage and Algiers), and into the seaport across Lake Tunis, from which goods are exported to Europe.

Between the two cities is an open linear space, a slim setback where the modern city faces the historic city. Crossing from the historic city into the modern city is designed to create the impression of moving forward in time, or, in other words, stepping into the civilized world, leaving the "backward" one behind.



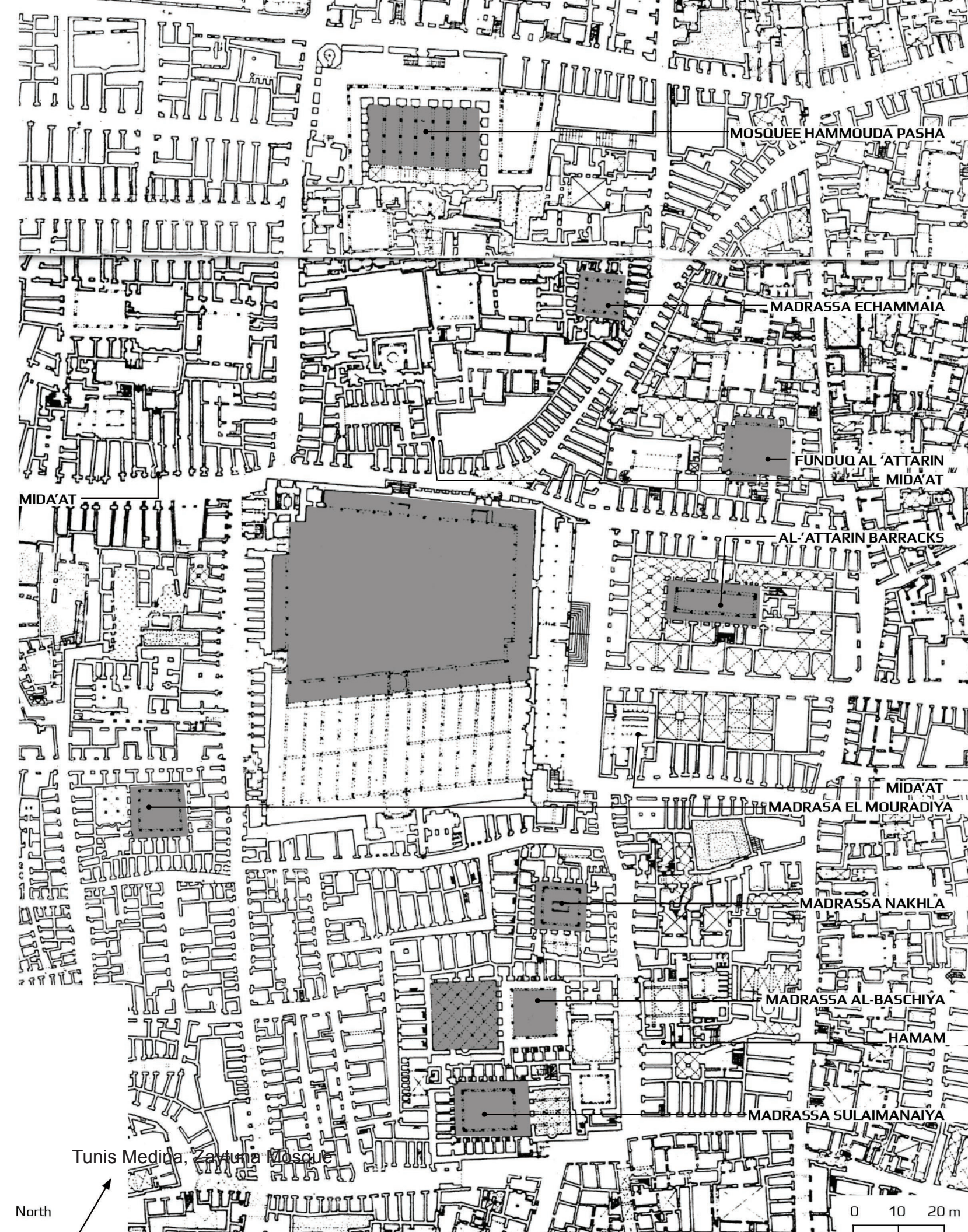
"Porte de France", Cardinal Lavigerie Statue. 1952 - (Photo by United Press)

The Dual City Model Emptied:

In 1956 Tunisia gained independence. That, and the subsequent gradual departure of French citizens, has ended this form of racial and cultural duality. Today the dual city equally faces a new set of historical, land, property, and ownership challenges that are entangled with contemporary socio-economic and urban environmental deterioration. This is compounded by national challenges: from waste management to marine and air pollution, to a warming regional climate.

Despite the imposing cathedral and French embassy, the Ville Nouvelle has long lost its sheen. Its buildings are dilapidated and deformed, its roads filled with street merchants, and the statues of French figures lining its boulevard have been replaced with figures and objects that convey new national narratives. Squatters, now in their third generation, occupied, encroached upon, and densified the residential block of the French quarter after the original owners left for France. They continue to fight back for their rights for housing, against a new government that is trying to claim these buildings.

Conversely, the overcrowded but still legible fabric of the Medina, choked by urban pressure against its walls, has partially escaped several invasive modernist urban plans drafted in the postcolonial period that would have sliced vehicular thoroughfares through it. This preserved city, maintained by the Association Sauvegarde de la Madina (ASM) since 1967, was listed as a world heritage site by UNESCO in 1979. Since the time of the French occupation, the tourist industry has increasingly overrun the Medina's quarters, enacting a new form of colonialism. New, poor migrants from rural communities now compete for space with upscale restaurants, gift shops, and inns designed to attract European tourists.



The Waqf (Charitable endowment) Conceptual Framework:

A general feature of Islamic social history, the waqf document is a prescriptive legal text that suspends any transactions that could be imposed on a physical property, instead endowing it in perpetuity for the benefit of the community.³

This document often dictates in architectural terms the beneficiaries and associated charitable programs; the spatial organization, building operation, material specifications; and norms and conditions of the property's physical upkeep (from land to buildings, to natural elements, to objects). In the history of Islamic architecture, the waqf produced and financially supported a variety of architectural typologies that served society's poor and needy. Waqf properties included agricultural land, waterworks, soup kitchens, schools, hostels, and hospices.

The studio proposes to use the waqf as a conceptual textual entry point into the design exercise.

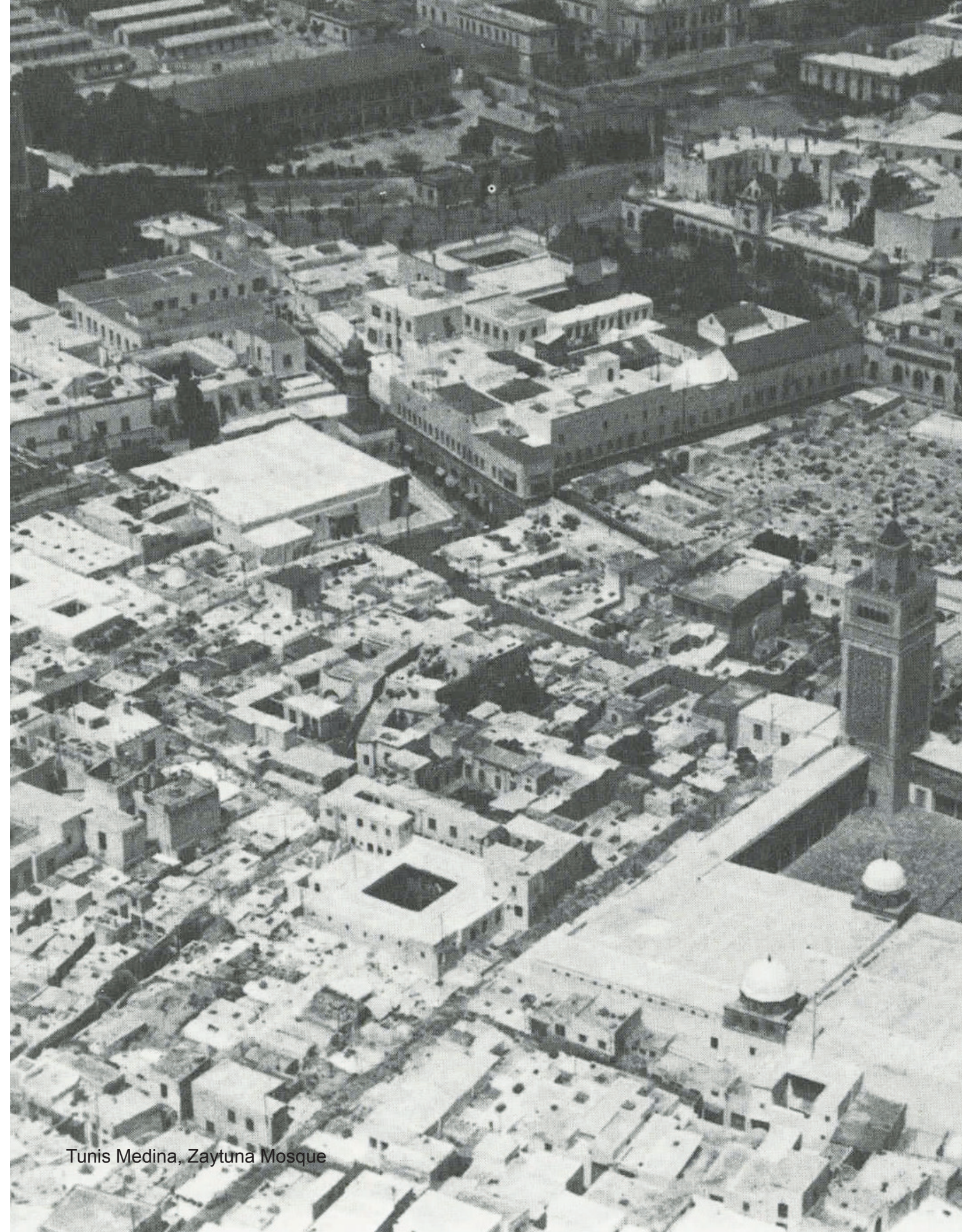
The Right to the (dual)City³

The French occupation, and the modern, secular Tunisian state that followed, weakened and confiscated the Islamic waqfs, thus robbing it of its ability to serve local communities. Drawing from waqf's long history of social welfare programs, the studio proposes to re-conceptualize the waqf document, narrating potential sites of interventions, program, spatial relationships, and imagined project changes futures.

In Tunis socio-cultural context and history, the waqf carries the capacity to reinvent the role of remaining religious institutions, such as the Zaytuna mosque, to address disputes over property rights, sacred land reclamation, and the right to live in a healthier city for both the Medina and Ville Nouvelle.

2. See: Amy Singer, "What is a Waqf?," In *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence, An Imperial Soup Kitchen in Jerusalem* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002) 17-22

3. See: David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *New Left Review* 53 (2008) 23-40



Tunis Medina, Zaytuna Mosque

Schedule:

Week 1
Sep 12 Monday Studio design brief review
Sep 14 Wednesday Adv V Lecture
Sep 15 Thursday Lecture: “What is Islamic Architecture?”

Week 2
Sep 19 Monday Desk Crits
Sep 21 Wednesday Adv V Event
Sep 22 Thursday Lecture: “The Islamic Waqf”

Week 3
Sep 26 Monday Desk Crits
Sep 29 Thursday Lecture: “Tunis Medina”

Week 4
Oct 3 Monday Pin Up
Oct 5 Wednesday Adv V Lecture:
Oct 6 Thursday Desk Crits

Week 5
Oct 10 Monday Pin Up
Oct 13 Thursday Travel to Tunisia

Week 6 (Mid Reviews Week)
Oct 17 Monday Travel to Tunisia
Oct 19 Wenesday Mid Review: Tunisia
Oct 20 Thursday Travel to New York

Week 7
Oct 24 Monday Desk Crits
Oct 27 Thursday Desk Crits

Week 8
Oct 31 Monday Desk Crits
Nov 2 Wednesday Adv V Lecture
Nov 3 Thursday Desk Crits

Week 9
Nov 7 Monday No Class (Election Day)
Nov 10 Thursday Desk Crits

Week 10
Nov 14 Monday Desk Crits
Nov 16 Wednesday Adv V Lecture
Nov 17 Thursday Desk Crits

Week 11
Nov 21 Monday Desk Crits
Nov 24 Thursday No Class (Thanksgiving)

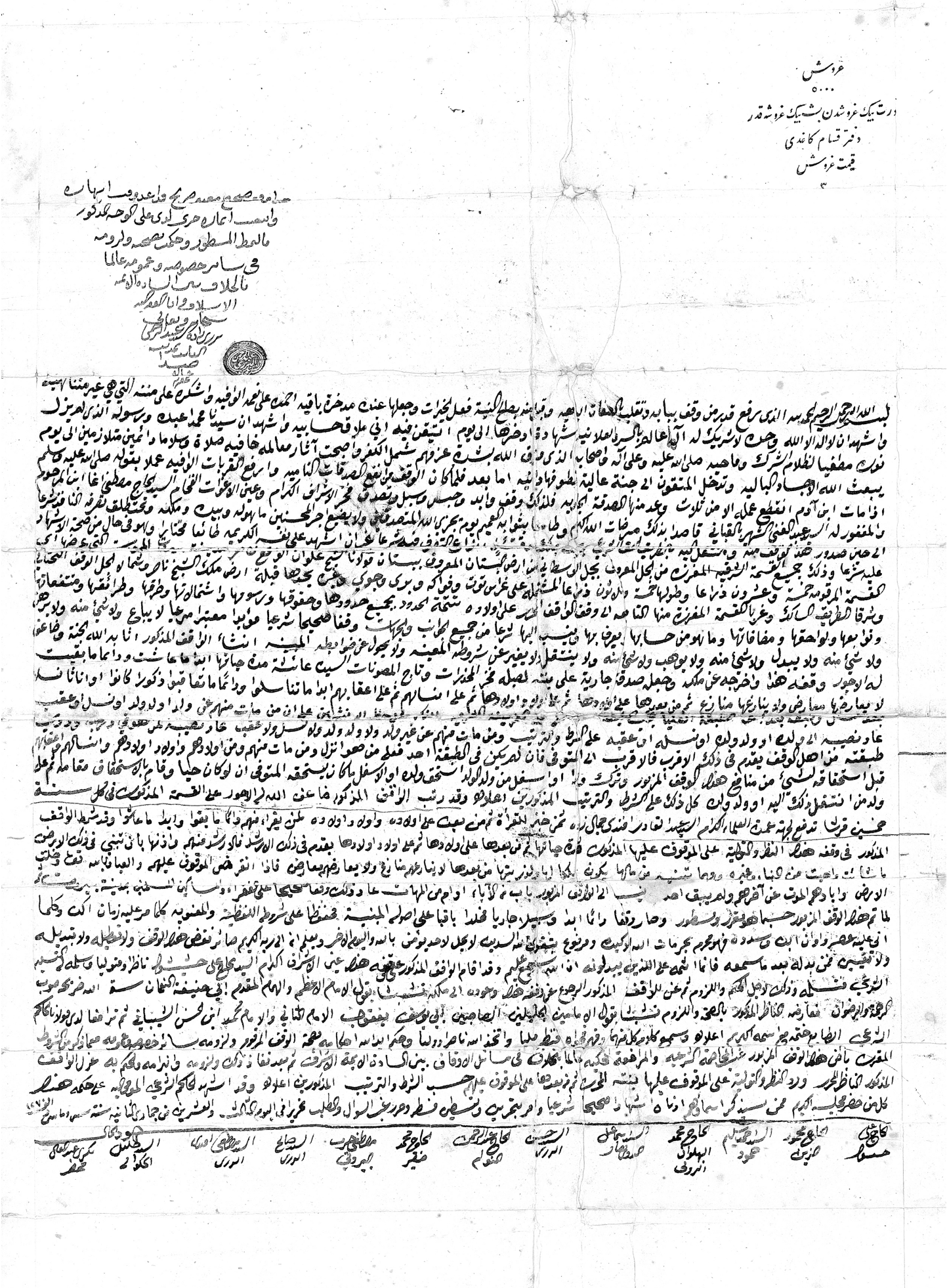
Week 12
Nov 28 Monday Pin Up
Dec 1 Thursday Desk Crits
Dec 2 Friday Last Day of Classes

Week 13
Dec 5 Monday Pin Up: Draft of Final Review
Dec 8 Thursday Desk Crits

Week 14 (Final Reviews Week)
Dec 12 Monday Final Review (Ware Lounge)

Working Method:

Students will be free to work in groups or individually. Group work is encouraged but not mandatory.



Mustafa Agha Waqf document, Lebanon

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Ralph Ghoche, “Erasing the Ketchaoua Mosque, Catholicism, assimilation, and civic identity in France and Algeria,” in *Neocolonialism and Built Heritage: Echoes of Empire in Africa, Asia, and Europe*, edited by Daniel E. Coslett, 87-105. London: Routldge, 2019

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Tunis Medina. 2019