

sists of the heads of landholding families or lineages. Its head (*amghar* in most Berber-speaking areas) is chosen, usually annually, on a rotating basis by the members. Decisions are made by consensus, typically after considerable consultation. Its responsibilities include maintaining roads and paths, water and irrigation systems, and the local mosque and its school; hiring the school's teacher; ensuring hospitality for visitors; organizing community support for families needing manpower (especially in plowing and harvesting); organizing community festivities; assigning communal land to families for cereal production; and setting times and rules for wood collection, grazing, and beginning the harvest. In the past, the *djema'a* had greater judicial functions: In accordance with the local *qanun*—essentially a list of fines and punishments for a wide variety of misdeeds—it regulated community life and ensured equal justice, responsibility, and benefit.

See also QANUN.

THOMAS G. PENCHOEN

DJERBA

An island off the southeast coast of Tunisia, near the Libyan border.

The island of Djerba (Jarba) is 198 square miles (514 sq km), shaped like a molar tooth, and connected to the mainland of Tunisia on the southeast by a ferry at Adjim and on the southwest by a bridge that dates from the Roman Empire. Between Djerba and the mainland is the shallow inland sea of Bou Grara. The island's elevation is low—barely 188 feet (54 m) above sea level at its highest point—and is surrounded by shallow beaches of fine sand and palm trees, especially in the northeast. The principal population center is Houmt-Souk, a market and fishing port on the north coast. Since Tunisian independence in 1956, dozens of tourist hotels and an airport have been built on Djerba.

Djerba is reputed to be the island of the lotus eaters in Homer's *Odyssey*. Djerba's early history is one of contact with many peoples—Berbers, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, and others. Companions of the prophet Muhammad brought the Arabic language and religion of Islam to Djerba in 665 C.E. Berber Kharijites, considered heretics by many orthodox Muslims, took refuge in southern Djerba after the Almohads

expelled them from western Algeria. Since then the southern part of the island has tended to be Berber and Kharijite, the northeast Arab and Malekite, and the center mixed in population.

During the Middle Ages, Djerba was the scene of continuous persecutions, conquests, revolts, reconquests, civil wars, and plagues. Spaniards, Sicilians, Hafids, Corsairs, and Ottoman Turks controlled the island at various times. In the eighteenth century, Tunis eventually won the contest with Tripoli for jurisdiction under the Ottoman Empire over Djerba. During the French protectorate, Djerba was under military administration from 1881 to 1890, then French civil administration until independence in 1956. The island is today part of the Tunisian Governorship of Medenine, and its population is a mix of Arab and Berber, plus elements of black African, Turkish, and Maltese origin.

The center and southeast of Djerba and portions of the nearby mainland are among the rare areas of Tunisia where a Berber language is spoken, although it is highly mixed with Arabic vocabulary.



An inside view of the *Griba* (wonderful) synagogue, located on the Isle of Djerba off the coast of southern Tunisia. Built in the time of Ezra (fifth century B.C.E.), it is believed that Ezra visited the island and that relics from the Temple of Jerusalem are within the synagogue's walls. Pilgrimages are still made in honor of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai, the Talmudic sage attributed with writing the *Zohar*, a mystical book. The synagogue was the target of a terrorist attack on 11 April 2002 that took the lives of several German tourists. © FULVIO ROITER/CORBIS. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION.



Midoun Jerba (or Djerba) passersby fill this Tunisian street on a sunny day. Djerba is an island in the central Mediterranean Sea, off the southeast coast of Tunisia. The island contains the remains of an ancient Roman civilization and is a popular tourist destination.

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According to Arab historian Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) “Djerba” originally referred to a branch of the Lemata Berbers.

Djerba is home to one of the few remaining Jewish communities in North Africa, the towns of Hara Sghira and Hara Kebira. According to local tradition, the Jewish community of Djerba dates from after the Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C.E.; others claim that Judeo-Berbers migrated to the island in the late eighth century C.E., following the Arab conquest of North Africa. The town of Hara Sghira is the site of the Ghriba—a Jewish synagogue, shrine, and site of a popular annual pilgrimage.

Djerba has low and irregular rainfall—averaging 8 inches (21 cm) per year—and high humidity. The

only freshwater sources on the island are a few wells in the northeast and rainwater captured by cisterns. This limits local agriculture to date palms of mediocre quality, olive trees, fruit trees, and some grains and legumes.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the pressures of increasing population on this ecologically marginal island have gradually forced people out of the traditional occupations of agriculture, fishing, weaving, and pottery-marking. As the island’s population increased from 31,800 in 1906 to 62,445 in 1956 to more than 82,000 in 1991, Djerbians began to rotate between the island and the mainland as shopkeepers. In reaction to anti-commercial policies of the Ben Salah government of the 1960s, Djerbians increasingly turned to international migration, and many of them have become successful shopkeepers and businessmen in the Paris area. The 2002 population of Djerba was estimated to have decreased to 60,300.

See also ARABIC; BEN SALAH, AHMED; BERBER; ISLAM; OTTOMAN EMPIRE; TUNISIA.

LAURENCE MICHALAK

DLIMI, AHMED

[1931–1983]

Moroccan military officer.

Ahmed Dlimi achieved dubious prominence during the Ben Barka affair of 1965 and 1966, when he was acquitted in a Paris trial. By the mid-1970s, he was King Hassan II’s closest military adviser; as a colonel, he was given command of the military seizure of the contested former Spanish colony of Western Sahara in 1974 and 1975. Promoted to general and given full control over theater operations, from 1979 to 1980 Dlimi oversaw the building of the “wall” in Western Sahara—a fortified sand barrier stretching across nearly 25 percent of the northern border. In early 1983, with relations souring between the military and the throne, Dlimi died in a mysterious auto accident.

See also BEN BARKA, MEHDI; HASSAN II.

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