

MENJEZ

THE PHOENICIANS' ROUTE

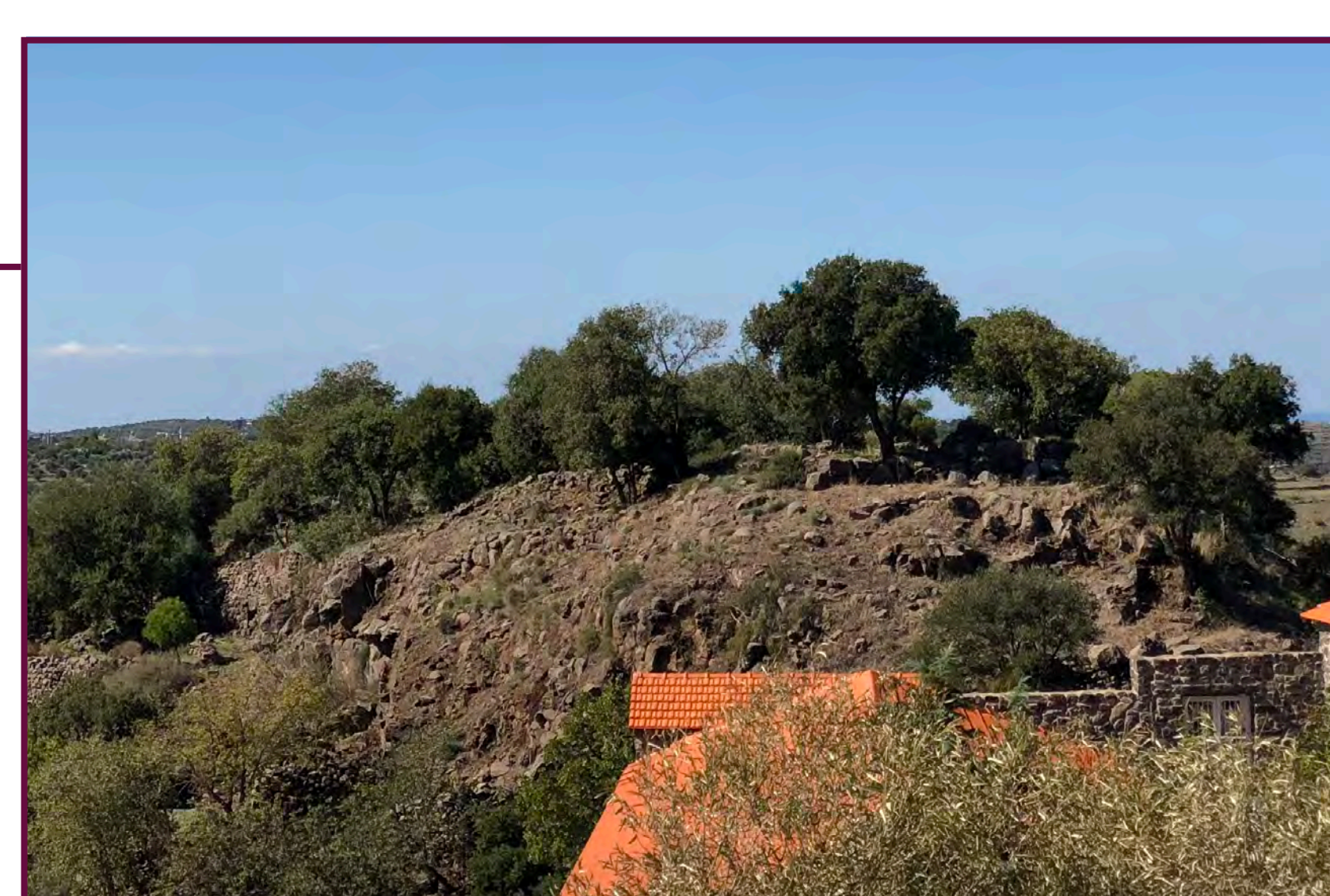
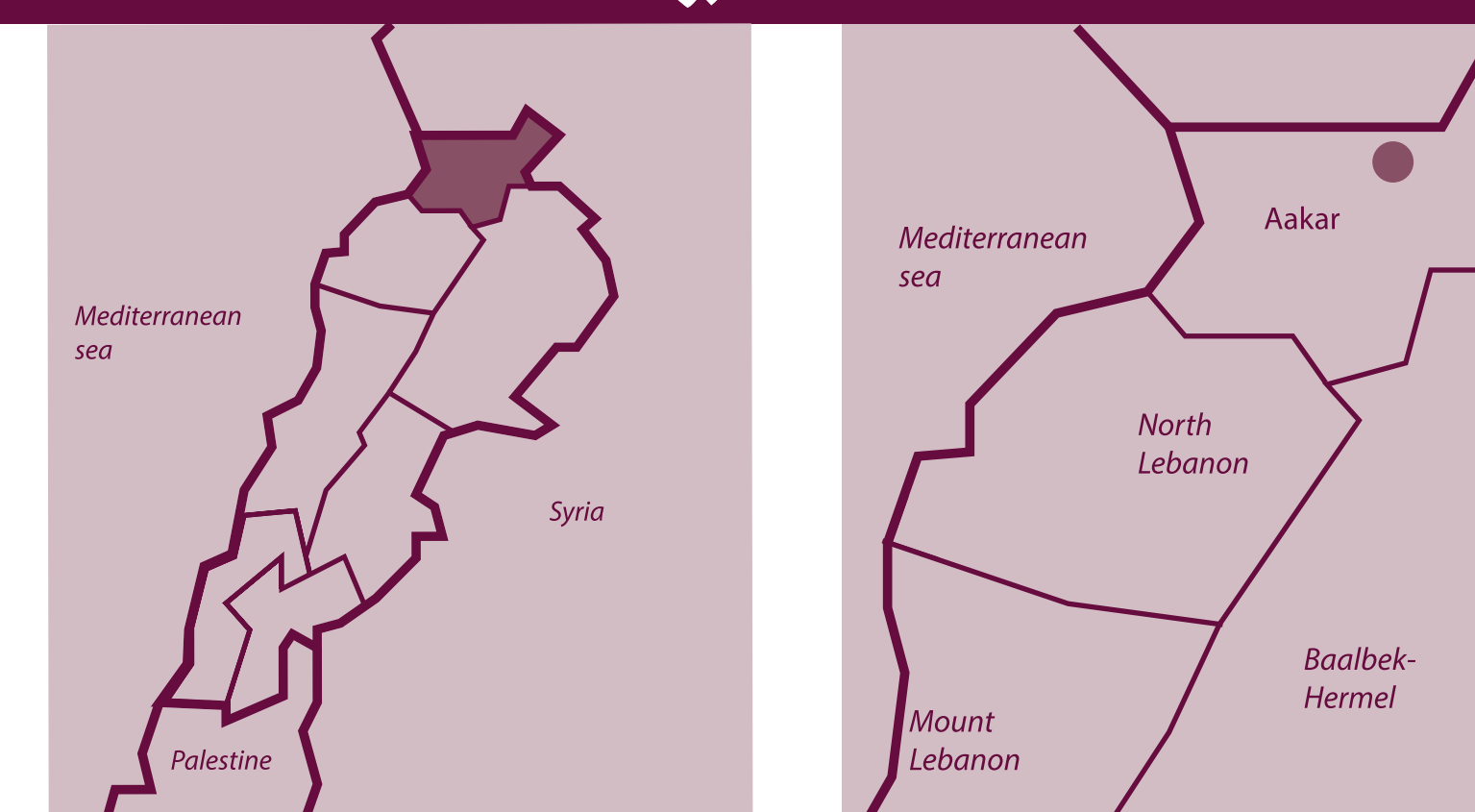
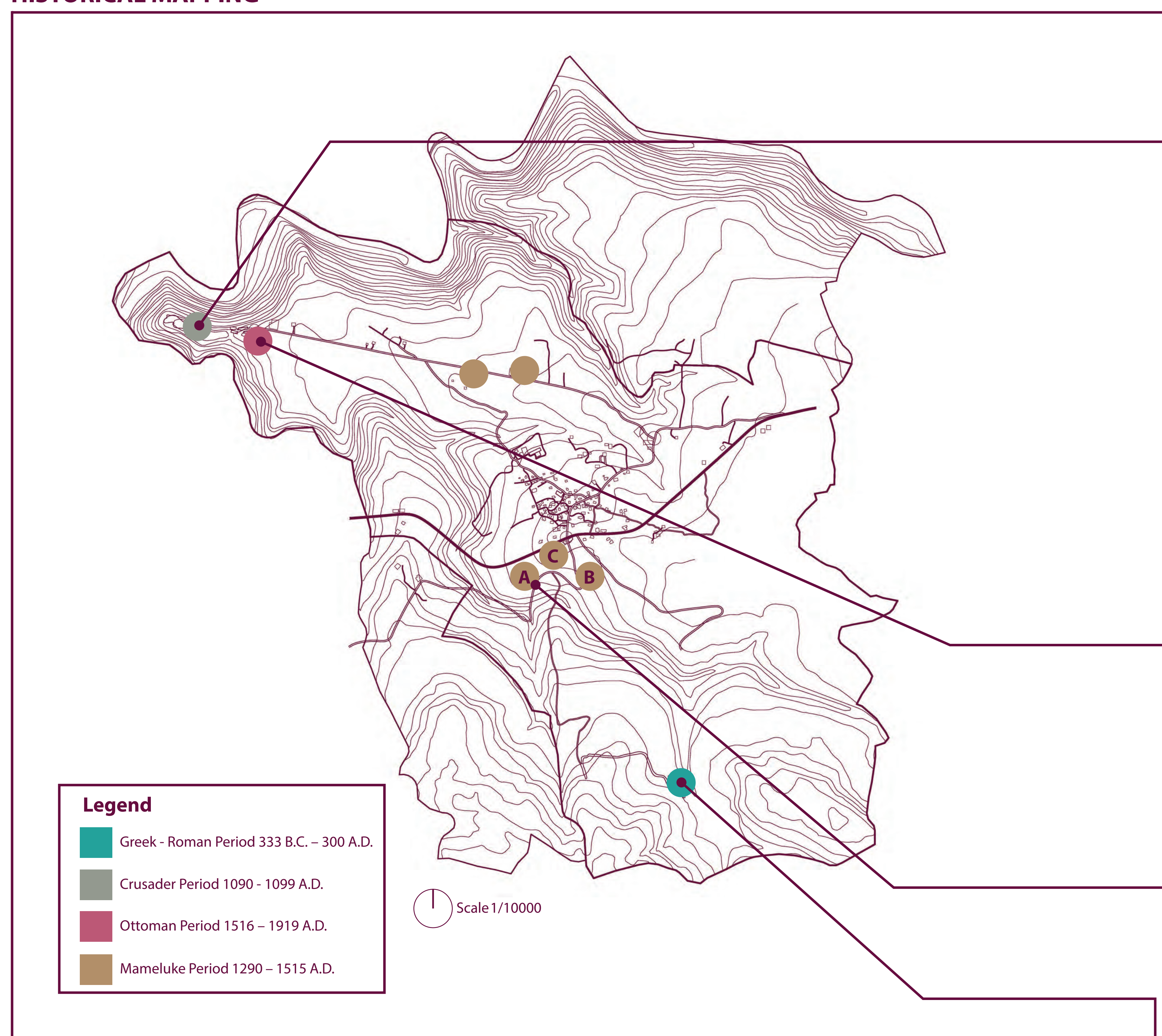
منجز

مسار الفينيقيين

INTRODUCTION

Menjez is a small village bordering Syria from the north, nestled in the mountains of Akkar Governorate. The village has a history that spans thousands of years, beginning at the Bronze Age till this modern day. Menjez features one of the only necropolises, belonging to the Chalcolithic era, in Lebanon, with a reported 80 Megalithic tombs being discovered, about which 11 have been restored. The Megalithic tombs are not only unique in their scarcity in Lebanon, but also that Menjez's monolithic stones are made from basaltic stone, exclusive to the region which Menjez sits on. These dark brown to tan black colored stones are widely different from the stones traditionally found in Lebanon. Few discoveries put the path of the Phoenicians in Menjez, with pottery and dated artifacts being unearthed at the village in recent years, not yet verified. But the most significant historical discovery was that of the Maqam Al-Rab temple in the early 1900's, built in the first century A.D., one of the few temples made of basaltic stone, dedicated to Nemesis, the Roman goddess of Justice. More recent findings such as the Crusaders castle, buried at the top of the hilltop overlooking Nahr Al-Kabir - the river that separates Lebanon and Syria - and the growing attention that the basaltic-stone clad houses the village are getting, Menjez is turning into an archaeological hub, where throes of international teams are descending into Menjez to restore the glory of the necropolis, the temple, the castle and the old houses.

HISTORICAL MAPPING



Qalaat Feliz

This Crusader fortress was built by the Crusaders who conquered much of the region (North Lebanon to Southern Syria) renaming the area "Conte de Tripoli". The fortress, due to its strategic location located on a high hill between two mountains, was built out of the basalt stones sourced from the region. The castle has been recently rediscovered by archaeologists after being ruined. The state of the fortress is severe, as the ruins lie surrounded by overgrowth and exposed to natural elements in the direst of states. There are not much written records of the fortress, unlike the megalithic tombs and the Beit Jaalouk Temple.



Saydet El Qalaa (Lady of The Fort)

The church was constructed in 1877 by the Maronite missionaries of the region. It faces Qalaat Feliz thus the name given to it as "Lady of the Fort", as it serves as a spiritual protector to the fort and the ideals carried by the builders of the fortress. The main church was built from basalt stones, similar to all main buildings in Menjez, and featured vaulted double height ceilings made from wood. Additional wings, including a monastery and a vocational institute were built in the later years. The gardens at the front of the church have become an attraction to residents, with fauna and flora cared for by the nuns of the church. The church is currently undergoing expansions and is quite a popular space for the people of Menjez.



Megalithic Tombs

Menjez was a popular necropolis with more than 300 tombs made from basalt rocks, unique to the area. The tombs date back to more than 5000 years, linking them to the Chalcolithic period. Carvings on the stones indicate a form of communication that existed. Due to their scattering, many unattended of the tombs monolithic rocks were smashed and used for construction, with their state in dire condition, surrounded by shrubs and overgrowth greenery. It is unknown if the Phoenicians appropriated the megaliths as their own or if they were disregarded, but in more recent times, the megalithic tombs have been of no importance to the occupants of the village until recently. With the assistance of University of Geneva, the megalithic tombs are now being preserved and maintained.



Maqam Al-Rab

Built in the first century A.D., this temple was later dedicated to Nemesis, goddess of Vengeance and Justice. It was built with basalt stones blocks. It is the only Roman basaltic temple of Lebanon, it is a peripteros temple with a cellae, a prostyle and a thalamus built on top of a crypt. Most of the stone blocks carry have been engraved. During the Byzantine era, the temple was converted into a church and monastery. This caused the disappearance of two portico columns. A distinctive separation between the quality of Roman cut rocks and later era cut rocks highlights the re-purposing of the temple's use. The temple was unearthed in 1897 and the government sanctioned excavations which started in the 1940's.

MEGALITHIC TOMBS

Map highlighting the necropolis area of the Levant, erected during the Bronze Age, in relation to the Phoenician settlement in the region.

The map super imposition shows a clear indication that the Phoenicians knew of the Megalithic Tombs, yet the extent of their interactions with the Necropolises remains unknown.

Megalithic Tombs (A)

Megalithic Tombs (B)

Megalithic Tombs (C)

Plans and Sections

ARQA

Landscape in Arqa

Ancient Bronze Age Settlement Architecture

Phoenician Artifacts

Arqa dates back to the Neolithic times with its significant Tell Arqa, a 40-meter-high hilltop is considered the main archaeological site of the area.

Arqa was the host of varying eras and cultures, including, the Phoenicians, the Assyrians, the Romans, the Crusaders, and is currently a dominant Sunni Muslim village. It is known, through excavations were initiated in 1972 by the French Archaeology Institute, that about 12 archaeological layers currently exist, dating back to the Bronze Age.

Nomadic tribes of the Early Bronze Age established home base in the village. Canaanites - later known as Phoenicians - developed a prosperous town at the Arqa site, with remnants of the town remaining to this day.

During 14th century B.C., the town was known as "Irqata", with mentions in the Egyptian Annals, Assyrian Annals and the Bible.

The current name of the city was given by the Romans as "Arqa Caesarea" and was the birthplace of the Roman Emperor Alexander Severus in 207 A.D., thus making Arqa a prestigious city in the Roman Empire's history, being a prosperous trade town. One of the first bishops of Arqa, Lucianos, professed the faith of the First Council of Nicaea at a synod, held in Antioch in 363, making it officially a Christian city.

By the First Crusade, Arqa became a strategic point to have control over the roads from Tripoli to Tartus and Homs. In 1108, William II of Jordan conquered it and became part of the Conte de Tripoli. It finally fell to Muslim forces of the Sultan Baibars in 1265. When Tripoli was taken over in 1289 to the army of Sultan Qalawun, Arqa lost its strategic importance and became a passing town throughout the later years.

CHRONOLOGY OF MAIN EVENTS

1200 - 333 B.C. - Phoenician and Canaanite Period

Pottery dating back to the Phoenician period was found scattered throughout the Necropolis, indicating the use of the Phoenicians to the Megalithic Tombs.

64 B.C. - 635 A.D. - Roman and Byzantine Period

A temple was built in Greco-Roman style out of basalt rocks, unique to the area. The temple was then dedicated to Nemesis, goddess of Vengeance and retribution by a priest name Drusus. During the Byzantine era, the temple was transformed into a monastery and church, few remnants of the change exist today.

1090 - 1099 A.D. - Crusader Period

During the Crusade period, the entire northern region of Lebanon and southern Syria were considered Conte de Tripoli, a fortress was built and named "Qalaat Feliz".

1877 A.D. - Missionaries Arrival

Maronite missionaries came to the area and built the church neighbouring the old fortress's ruin, naming the church "Saydet El-Qalaa".

1940 - 1970 - Archaeology Boom

International archaeologists became very interested in the area uncovering the megalithic tombs, ruins of the Crusaders fortress and the Roman temple.

1975-1990 - Lebanese Civil War

The Lebanese Civil War broke out, displacing the entire population of Menjez as their homes were burned down and destroyed. Many old historical houses no longer exist due to that event. Residents were forced to be, through sea to neighbouring Syrian.

2012 - Post-Municipality

Menjez inaugurates its first municipality board and mayor. The elected officials start many initiatives to create job opportunities, clean renewable energy and enhance tourism. Plans are set for many of the historical sites to be restored and protected.

EVALUATION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND HISTORICAL BUILDINGS

The plethora of historic sites scattered about Menjez are in quite a dire state and most of them neglected, covered in overgrowth and fauna. The condition of the megalithic tombs is critical, even those that are refurbished are in such proximity to the roads, infrastructures such as electric poles are open to all sorts of external environmental conditions. The rarity of the basaltic stone monoliths should be taken into consideration when looking into the refurbishment. But not only are the megaliths in a critical state, but the Roman Temple is open to the public with no restrictions, where members of the public use the ancient site as hunting grounds, stepping on columns, stones and tablets with no regard. Meanwhile the Crusader's fortress remains in a state of rubble, with insufficient funds to restore it to its former glory.

Although, the church has introduced measures to take care of the fortress, it remains inadequate to highlight its importance.

