

# ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES  
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES  
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS  
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

N° 498

## A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : The Medina of Sousse

Location : Governorate of Sousse

State Party : Tunisia

Date : December 30, 1987

## B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria III, IV and V.

## C) JUSTIFICATION

Outside the medina, southwest of the walled area principally occupied by the casbah, the museum of Sousse provides a voyage into the port city's past. At successive stages it was the Phoenician outpost of Hadrumete, the free Roman city of Hadrumetum, the capital of Byzacene under Diocletian, the Vandal city of Hunericopolis, and lastly the Byzantine city of Justiniana or Justinianopolis. No monument however subsists in situ from these thousand years of history, for during his conquest of Ifrîqiya, Oqba Ibn Nafîi entirely destroyed Justinianopolis after a two-month siege. Built in the late 7th century on these ruins and given its present name, Sousse was a completely new city.

The most ancient monument still standing, the Ribat, belongs to that period. It was part of the first generation of coastal forts which formed a line of defense extending from Alexandria to Ceuta to protect Islam from the Byzantine fleets. The ribats housed the garrisons of the Defenders of the Faith, the Mourabitîn, and their austere architecture reflected the structures' dual military/religious function. The ribat of Sousse predates the one at Monastir (796), which was originally built as its annex. In 821 the emir Ziyadat Allah I completed the fortifications by adding a square bastion featuring a tower which served both as a watch tower and a minaret. From the enclosed port, protected by these walls, the Muslim troops embarked in 827 on their conquest of Sicily.

Under the Aghlabids (800-909), Sousse rapidly flourished, abetted by the establishment of a powerful Muslim fleet, expanded trade with Sicily, and the growing importance of the capital at Kairouan, to which it was the closest port and connected by a natural waterway. Certain significant dates stand out in this golden century : 838-841 - construction of the mosque of Bu Ftata; 844 - construction of the first casbah; 851 - construction of the Great Mosque, founded by the emir Abul Abbas Mohammed. In 859, the urban walls seem to have been in their final stage of completion, as attested to by an inscription in Kufic letters on the southern rampart. Thus, the limits of the medina were broadly sketched. The surrounding fortifications made the military function of the ribat less vital and it reverted in full to its religious function. Since then it has been maintained by marabouts who are ever vigilant that orthodox practices be observed.

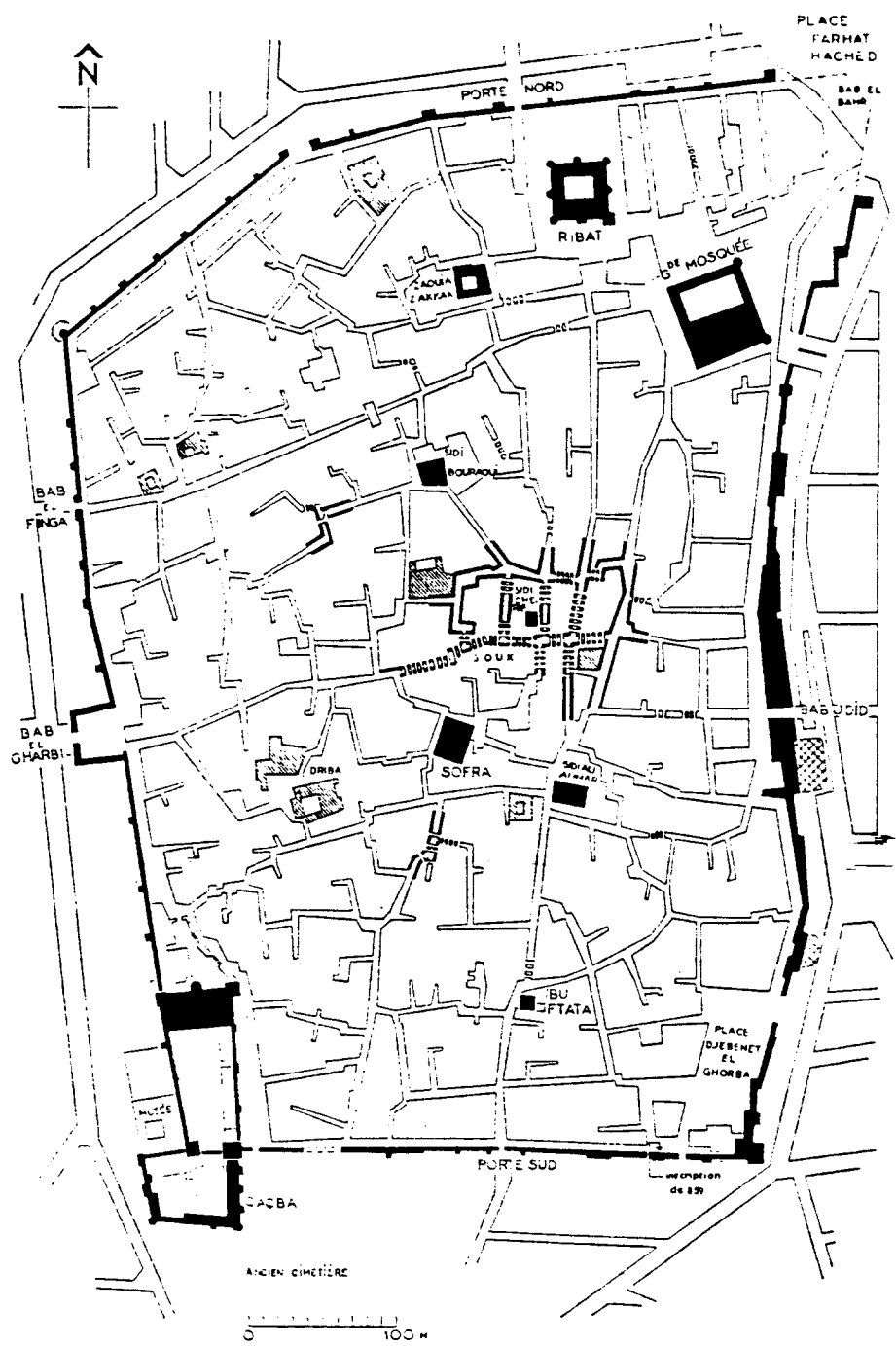
Beginning with the rise of the Fatimids, Sousse underwent a long period of tribulation, interspersed with phases of prosperity. The port first declined with the founding of Mahdia in 916, yet reestablished itself in the 11th century. In the 12th century its status was again compromised when the Sicilian Normans captured Sousse and held it for 11 years. The Spanish troops of Charles V took Mahdia in 1554. After this it recovered somewhat, but never again regained its former importance.

ICOMOS is favorable to the inclusion of the Medina of Sousse on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria III, IV and V.

- **Criterion III.** With the ribat, the casbah, the ramparts, the Mosque of Bu Ftata and the Great Mosque, Sousse bears exceptional witness to the civilization of the first centuries of the Hegira. The medina was conceived according to a regular plan with its meridian axis running from Bab el Khabli to the ribat and the ancient interior port, and its east-west axis going from Bab el Djedid to Bab el Gharbi. It constitutes a precocious and interesting example of the new type of Islamic city.

- **Criterion IV.** The most ancient and best conserved of all, the ribat of Sousse is an outstanding example of this type of construction. It features a rectangular enclosure flanked with towers and turrets, a single gate on the south, an inner courtyard rising over two levels with 35 cells giving onto it. It has a mosque on the southern side of the first storey with the southeast tower, added in 821, serving as both minaret and watch tower; from it signals could be transmitted to the ribat at Monastir.

- **Criterion V.** The medina of Sousse in its entirety constitutes an outstanding example of a traditional human habitation which has become vulnerable through the impact of irreversible change.



— Sousse, plan de la vieille ville.