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## Amphitheatre of El Jem (Tunisia) No 38

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### 1. BASIC DATA

*State Party:* Tunisia

*Name of property:*

Amphitheatre of El Jem

*Location:*

Governorate of Mahdia

*Inscription:* 1979

*Brief Description:*

The impressive ruins of the largest colosseum in North Africa, a huge amphitheatre which could hold up to 35,000 spectators, are found in the small village of El Jem. This 3rd-century monument illustrates the grandeur and extent of Imperial Rome.

*Date of ICOMOS' approval of this report:* 17 March 2010

### 2. ISSUES RAISED

*Background*

The decree n°103 dated 16 December 1920 established the protection of the monument and its surroundings against modern constructions by creating a building free zone with a radius of 300 m around the property. In the nomination file, a *plan d'aménagement de la ville d'El Jem* was included where the uses are established for the surrounding area.

On 9 June 1988, in response to a questionnaire entitled *Information update on the cultural sites inscribed on the World Heritage List*, the State Party reported that: *The buffer zone around the amphitheatre did not undergo any attack since the proposal for an inscription. However it is advisable to announce that if the adjustment of this space is practically finished in the southern sector or in a good way of completion on the north side, it is not the same for the two east and west sectors, where the extension of the buffer zone and development of the building encounters very complex land and social problems.*

During the 16<sup>th</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee (16 COM, Santa Fe, 1992), the State Party reported that new constructions would be prohibited by order of the President within a radius of 100 meters around the

amphitheatre (16 COM p.13). However, this was not established formally as a buffer zone. It was also considered that new construction detracted from the authenticity of the property and its character.

The retrospective inventory process identified gaps in information and requested the State Party to submit the largest scale topographic or cadastral map available showing the boundary of the inscribed property and its buffer zone and to indicate the size in hectares of the property and the buffer zone.

At the 33rd session of the World Heritage Committee (Seville, 2009) the State Party presented a plan showing the boundaries of the property and its buffer zone. The inscribed property covers an area of 1.37ha, and the proposed buffer zone an area of 26.41ha. The circular shape of the proposed buffer zone (radius of 300 meters from the centre of the amphitheatre) does not allow for the urban fabric or cadastral boundaries, but as it is relatively large, it includes the area immediately around the property.

During the session, the World Heritage Committee adopted the following recommendation:

Decision 33 COM 8B.42:

*The World Heritage Committee,*

1. *Having examined Documents WHC-09/33.COM/8B and WHC-09/33.COM/INF.8B1.Add,*

2. *Refers the examination of the proposed buffer zones for the Amphitheatre of, Tunisia, back to the State Party to allow it to:*

- *provide information on the institutional arrangements and regulatory measures to manage and control development within the proposed buffer zone.*

*Modification*

On 1st February 2010, the State Party provided the following information and indications concerning the protection of the property:

A presidential decree limits the height of buildings to 5m within a radius of 100 meters from the centre of the amphitheatre, and all rehabilitation, redevelopment or construction applications in this zone must be approved by the services of the Institut National du Patrimoine.

The *Plan d'aménagement de la ville d'El Jem* provides for restricted areas in the buffer zone, and in the archaeological zones (in which all interventions must be preceded by a historic and archaeological study), and for vision cones to preserve urban perspectives (limiting height to 6.40 meters).

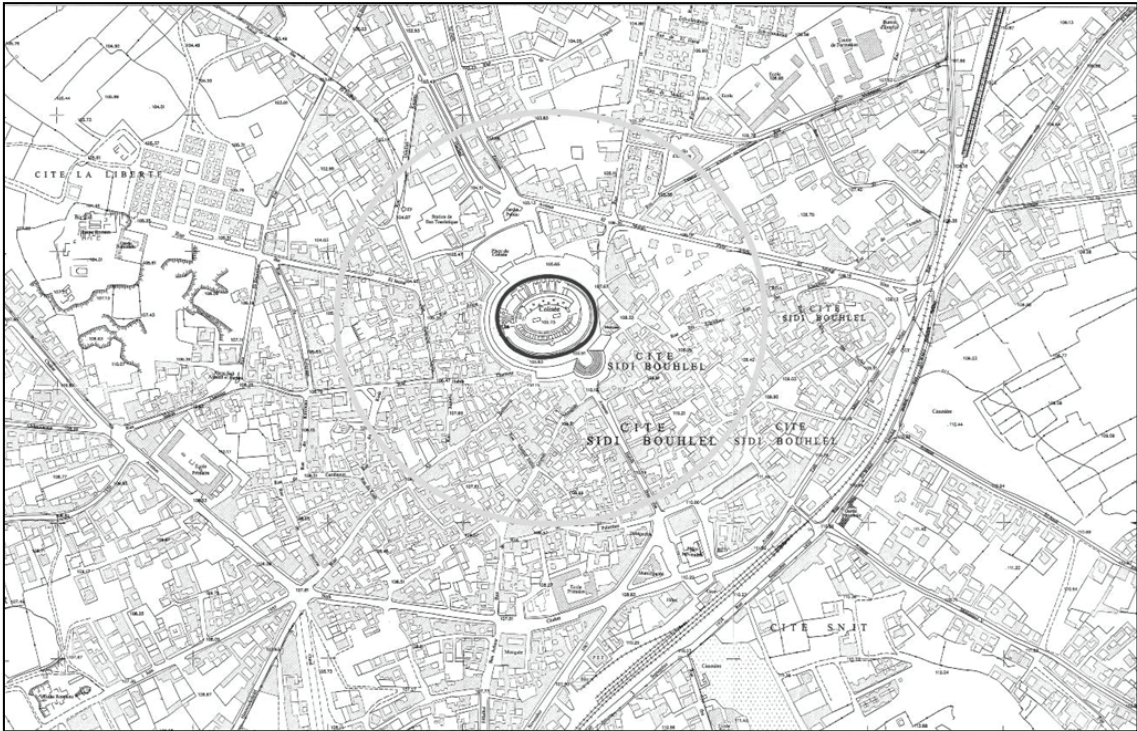
The heritage code (Law 1994-35 of 24 February 1994 on the protection of the archaeological, historic and traditional arts heritage) grants the state a right of inspection for all interventions around the monument (restricted area) and guarantees compliance with the provisions indicated above.

The preservation and management of the Amphitheatre of El Jem is carried out by a management unit run jointly by the *Institut National du Patrimoine* (responsible for scientific and technical matters) and the *Agence de Mise en Valeur du Patrimoine et de Promotion Culturelle* (in charge of the promotion and commercial management of the site).

ICOMOS considers that this information is satisfactory.

### **3. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS**

ICOMOS recommends that the proposed buffer zone for the Amphitheatre of El Jem, Tunisia, be **approved**.



Map showing the boundaries of the proposed buffer zone