

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° 493

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : The Medieval City of Rhodes

Location : Rhodes Island

State Party : Greece

Date : December 30, 1987

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

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

C) JUSTIFICATION

From 1309 to 1523 Rhodes was occupied by the Knightly Order of St. John of Jerusalem who had lost their last stronghold in Palestine, St. John of Acre, in 1291. They proceeded to transform the island capital into a fortified city able to withstand sieges as terrible as those led by the Sultan of Egypt in 1444 and Mehmet II in 1480. An anachronic vestige of the Crusades, Rhodes finally fell in 1522 after a six-month siege carried out by Suleyman II, heading forces reportedly numbering 100,000 men.

The medieval city is located within a wall 4 kilometers long. It is divided according to the Western classic style, with the high town to the north and the lower town south-southwest.

Originally separated from the town by a fortified wall, the high town, or Collachium, was entirely built by the Knights Hospitalers who, following the dissolution of the Templars in 1312, became the strongest military order in all Christendom. The Order was organized into seven "tongues", each having its own seat, or "inn". The inns of the tongues of Italy, France, Spain and Provence lined both sides the principal east-west axis, the famous Street of the Knights, one of the finest testimonies to Gothic urbanism. Somewhat removed to the north, close to the site of the Knights' first hospice, stands the Inn of Auvergne, whose facade bears the arms of Guy de Blanchefort, Grand Master from 1512 to 1513. The original hospice was replaced in the 15th century by the Great Hospital, built between 1440 and 1489, on the south side of the Street of the Knights; today the building is used as the archaeological museum.

Located northwest of the Collachium are the Grand Masters' Palace and St. John's Church. At the far eastern end of the Street of the Knights, built against the wall, is St. Mary's Church which the Knights transformed into a cathedral in the 15th century.

The lower town is almost as dense with monuments as the Collachium. In 1522, with a population of 5000, it was replete with churches, some of Byzantine construction. After 1523, most were converted into Islamic mosques, like the Mosque of Soliman, Kavakli Mestchiti, Demirli Djami, Peial ed Din Djami, Abdul Djelil Djami, Dolapli Mestchiti. Throughout the years, the number of palaces and charitable foundations multiplied in the south/southeast area : the Court of Commerce, the Archbishop's Palace, the Hospice of St. Catherine, and others.

The ramparts of the medieval city, partially erected on the foundations of the Byzantine enclosure, were constantly maintained and remodeled between the 14th and 16th centuries under the Grand Masters Giovanni Battista degl'Orsini (1467 - 1476), Pierre d'Aubusson (1476-1505), Aimery d'Amboise (1505 - 1512) and Fabrizio del Carretto (1513-1521). Artillery firing posts were the final features to be added. At the beginning of the 16th century, in the section of the Amboise Gate, which was built on the northwest angle in 1512, the curtain wall was 12 meters thick with a 4-meter high parapet pierced with gun holes.

ICOMOS, recalling that in 1980 the modern capital of the order of St. John of Jerusalem, which was established in 1530 at La Valetta, was inscribed on the World Heritage List, is a fortiori favorable to the inclusion of the city of Rhodes, on the basis of criteria II, IV and V.

- Criterion II. The fortifications of Rhodes, a "Frankish" town long considered to be impregnable, exerted an influence throughout the eastern Mediterranean basin at the end of the Middle Ages.

- Criterion IV. This cultural property is an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble which illustrates the significant period of history in which a military/hospital order founded during the Crusades survived in the eastern Mediterranean area in a context characterized by an obsessive fear of siege. Rhodes is one of the most beautiful urban ensembles of the Gothic period. The fact that this medieval city is located on an island in the Aegean Sea, that it was on the site of an ancient Greek city, and that it commands a port formerly embellished by the Colossus erected by Chares of Lindos, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, only adds to its interest. Finally, it must be noted that the chain of history was not broken in 1523 but rather continued up to 1912 with the additions of valuable Islamic monuments, such as mosques, baths and houses.

- Criterion V. With its Frankish and Ottoman buildings the old town of Rhodes is an important ensemble of traditional human settlement, characterized by successive and complex phenomena of acculturation. Contact with the traditions of the Dodecanese changed the forms of Gothic architecture and building after 1523 combined vernacular forms resulting from the meeting of two worlds with decorative elements of Ottoman origin. All the built-up elements dating before 1912 have become vulnerable because of the evolution in living conditions and they must be protected as much as the great religious, civil and military monuments, the churches, monasteries, mosques, baths, palaces, forts, gates and ramparts.

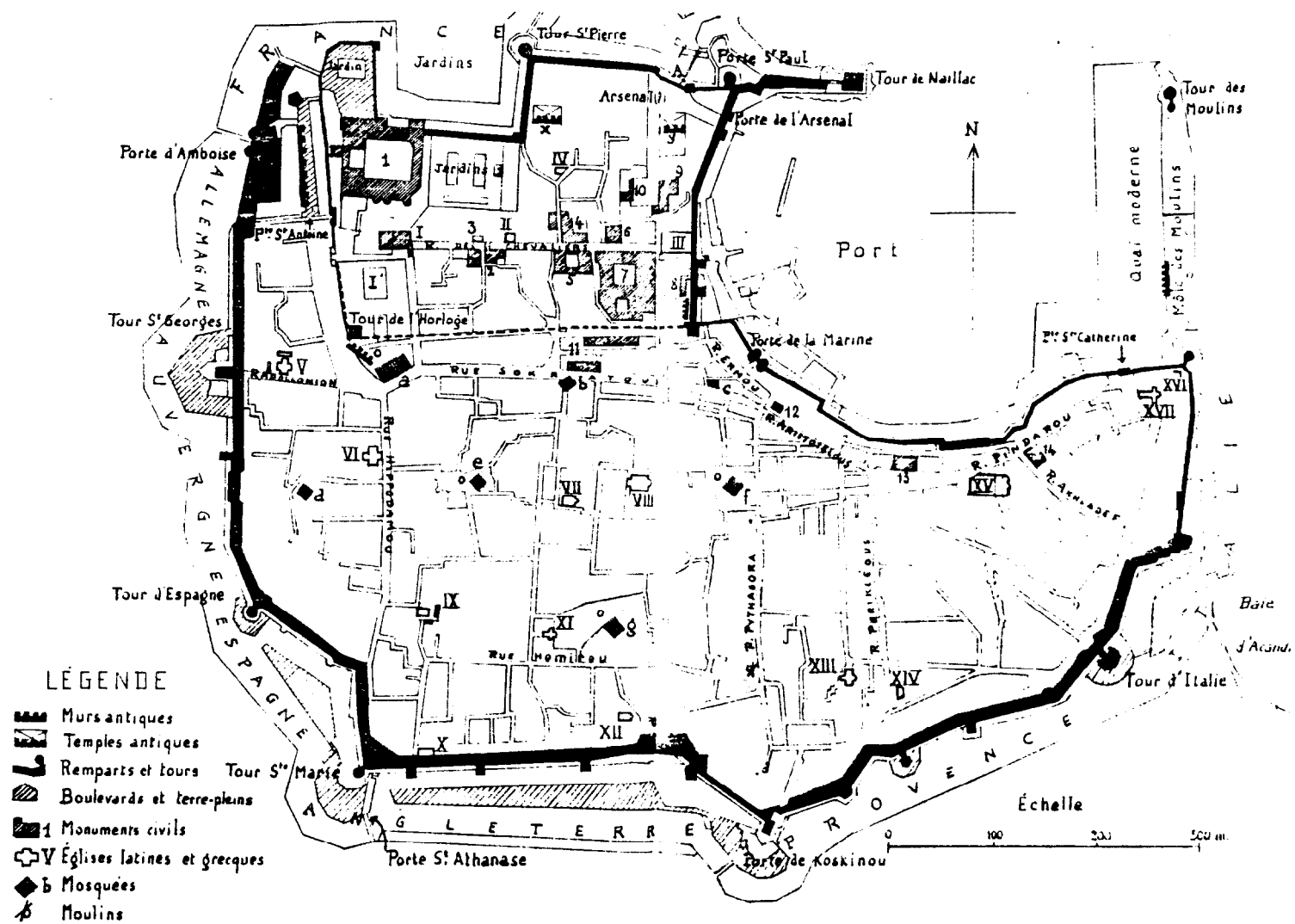
ICOMOS, however, wishes to qualify this very favorable opinion with remarks concerning the restoration policy adopted in Rhodes in the 20th century and warnings with which the World Heritage Committee could agree.

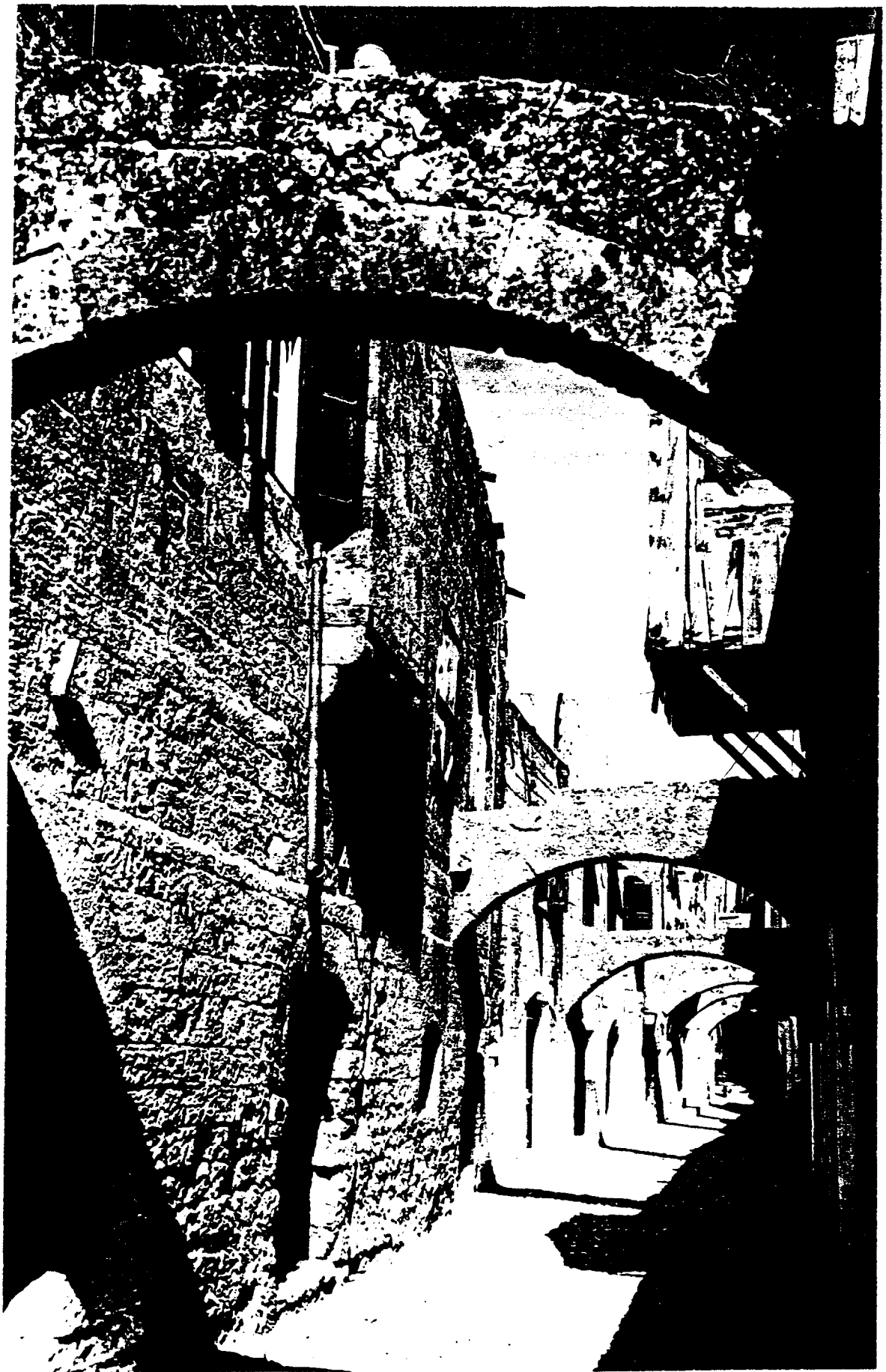
The Italian occupation from 1912 to 1948 left a strong imprint on the urban landscape of Rhodes. To the north of the modern city is a hodgepodge of restorations and pastiches (St. John's Church, the Governor's Palace) and the heavy Mussolini-period architecture of the Port of Mandraki. In the medieval city, beyond the Gate of Liberty dating from 1924, the Loge of St. John and especially the Grand Masters' Palace, which was entirely reconstructed in the style of the 1500s and sumptuously appointed to serve as the residence of Victor-Emmanuel III and Il Duce, are grandiose pastiches which are devoid of archaeological rigor. The monumental fountains that embellish public squares were similarly inspired by an outlook condemned by the Charter of Venice.

Desirable or not, these pseudo-medieval monuments are a permanent integral part of the urban history of Rhodes. It remains to be seen whether extreme restoration policies based on a firmly established tradition will continue to be carried out under the pretext of integrated preservation or touristic development.

Fortunately the project to rebuild the Colossus of Rhodes was abandoned. Now what must be considered is the future interest and feasibility of the project to rebuild the tower of Naillac as drawn up by the architect S. Bodo. Built from 1395 to 1421 under the Grand Master Philibert de Naillac, the tower controlled the western access of the narrows of the commercial port. It collapsed in 1863. Is it truly an absolute priority to restore it with stone veneer covering a concrete core ?

ICOMOS, September 1988





Rue Saint-Phanourios