The *Ribat* Towns

Mourad Rammah

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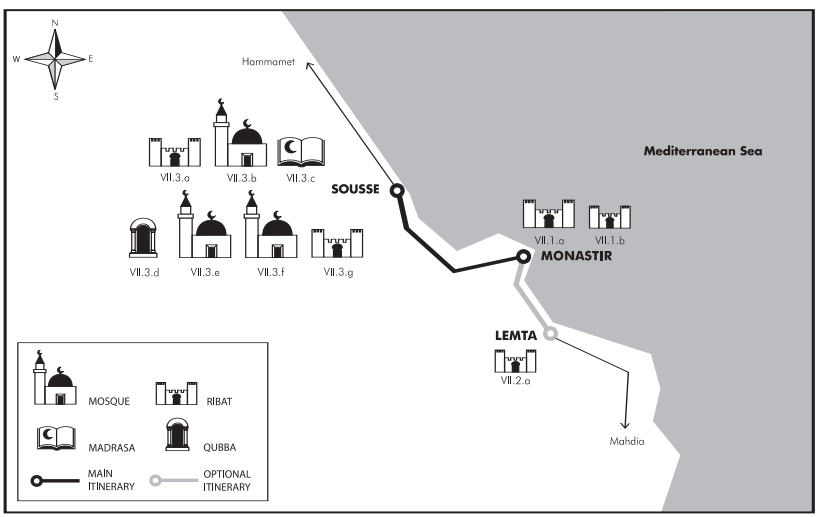


The Ribat, Monastir.

Monastir

The assaults of the Byzantine fleet along the coast following the Muslim Conquest forced the Ifriqiyans to build a continuous line of defence consisting of fortresses called *ribat*s. They rose along the coastline from Tangier to Alexandria and communicated via the use of fires lit up at the top of the towers. The *ribat*s served as a refuge for the inhabitants of the surrounding countryside and were lived in by warrior monks. The prolonged stays and visits of the most illustrious Ifriqiyan scholars, jurisconsults and ascetics reinforced the spiritual prestige of these buildings, transforming them into veritable monastery-fortresses and centres of learning that transmitted Arab-Muslim culture along the north coast of North Africa. The proximity of Sousse and Monastir to Kairouan, as well as their strategic positions as frontline watch towers defending the capital, meant that they possessed a military role of the first order. Their *ribat*s gained an utterly unique renown and became the core for future urban developments. Their dual military and religious purpose were reflected in their robust and austere architecture, characterised by the use of stone and vaults made of rubble and the banishment of wood coverings and light structures. This type of architecture spread across the whole of the Tunisian Sahel, and Sousse and Monastir became the two *ribat*-towns *par excellence*.

The Ribat, interior courtyard, Lemta.

Whilst all making reference to the same school of architecture, they nevertheless each underwent a slightly different evolution. Sousse became in the 3rd/9th century the headquarters of the Aghlabid fleet and the most important naval military base, which was involved in the Conquest of Sicily in 211/827, as well as being the crucible of Mediterranean commerce, all without losing its appeal to Islamic scholars, some of whom preferred it to all other bastions of Islam.

Monastir's evolution took a more spiritual turn, and became, during the Middle Ages, a place of pilgrimage during religious festivals, and there are still many Sahelians, especially the Mahdians, who wish to bury their dead in its blessed earth. In fact, the evolution of Sousse and Monastir complemented each other perfectly, incarnating the whole dialectic of the spirit of the *ribat*.

Situated at the far end of the headland, the antique Ruspina derives its name from the Punic "Rus Penna", which into Latin translates as *Caput Anguli*, a name justified by the very marked corner that forms the coastline on this site. This headland was an ideal place from which to defend the coastline, thus explaining the Abbasid Governor Harthama Ibn A'yun's choice, in 178/795, of it as a site on which to build his model *ribat*, a type imported from the East. The passion Ifriqiyan

scholars and ascetics felt for such institutions facilitated the population of this new *qsar* and, during the 2nd–3rd/first half of the 9th century, several *ribat*s were built in Monastir, such as the Ibn al-Ja'ad Ribat, and the Dhuayib Ribat in 239/854. Overtaken first by Sousse, which became the Aghlabid naval base, and then by Mahdia which became the Fatimid Capital, Monastir had to content itself, throughout the Middle Ages, with its essentially spiritual role, becoming a place of pilgrimage, a *ribat*, and one of the bastions of orthodoxy to face the Shi'ite challenge. Nevertheless, the town continued to grow, and was described by al-Bakri, writing in the middle of the 5th/11th century, as follows: *" ... it is a vast fortress, extremely high, enclosing a considerably large suburb. At the heart of this suburb, one sees a second, very large fortress, full of lodgings, mosques and castles with several floor levels. In this secure and powerful place one discovers a great number of baths. Not long ago, the inhabitants of Kairouan donated large amounts of money and charity to it. Close to al-Monastir is a huge salt marsh that provides ships with cargoes of salt intended for export to other countries. Al-Monastir has, within its area, five* mahri*s, built very solidly, which are inhabited by pious people".* Monastir does not seem to have suffered from the Hilalian invasions in the same way that Kairouan did, and al-Idrissi reports that, during the middle of the 6th/12th century, *"Mahdia had neither gardens nor orchards. Neither did it have palm trees. Fruits are brought in from Monastir ... Monastir"*, he continues, *"consists of three fortresses grouped together, full of devout inhabitants. The Arabs (Hilalians) do not cause damage to their orchards, nor to their plantations. The inhabitants of Mahdia use small boats to transport their dead to Monastir where they are buried".* The exodus of Muslims from Sicily following the Norman Conquest, followed by the exodus of the Kairouanese, contributed to the growing urbanisation of the town. It seems that even when Mahdia was seized by the Normans in 542/1148, Monastir managed to escape this fate and served as a refuge for the Mahdians. Without doubt, it is from this time onwards that one can date Monastir's extension and the birth of one of its suburbs. The decline of Kairouan followed by that of Mahdia, during the Hafsid era, led to the decadence of Monastir, which folded back onto itself and continued to grow stagnant. Leo the African, who visited Monastir at the start of the 10th/16th century, describes it thus: *"It is surrounded by forts and high walls. The houses within it have also been built with an equal amount of care. One thing is for certain and that is that the inhabitants are*

Ruins of the Ribat of Sidi al-Ghedamsi, Monastir.

The Ribat, facade looking over the courtyard, Monastir.

poor … Within Monastir, a great number of properties are planted with fruit trees such as apricot trees, fig trees, apple trees, pomegranate trees and an infinite number of olive trees. But the sovereign cripples the town with taxes". In fact, Monastir would end up by revolting against the Hafsid Sultan Mulay Hassan, who became an ally of the Spanish. Between 945/1539 and 955/1549, the town was sacked several times by the naval fleets of Charles Quint, lead by André Doria. In the 10th–11th/end of 16th century, it was conquered by the Turks. In the Muradite era, during struggles between the two Murad brothers, Monastir sided with Mohamed, who took refuge there in 1091/1680. Throughout the modern era, Monastir regained its strength, becoming a centre for the transmission of Sufism and asceticism.

VII.1 MONASTIR

Take the coastal route towards Sousse.

VII.1.a The Ribat

This monument is situated on the coast road. Entrance fee. Opening times: 08.3–17.30 from 16th September–31th March, and from 08.00–19.00 the rest of the year. Closed Mondays. On-site parking. Toilets available.

The *ribat* was built in 178/795–179/796 by the Abbasid General Harthama Ibn A'yun, and underwent various enlargements throughout the ages. Originally, in its first stage of construction, the *ribat* was composed of a rectangular enclosure with towers in each corner. In the south-east corner

rose a high cylindrical minaret that made reference to Mesopotamian influences. Inside, the courtyard was surrounded by porticoes onto the which the rooms looked out. The prayer hall, on the first floor, was composed of two bays and seven naves, the axial nave being larger than the others. This architectural layout, applied for the first time to a prayer room, would become the norm for all Ifriqiyan mosques.

The architectural plan of Harthama's *ribat* would serve as the model for the main Ifriqiyan *ribat*s built along the coast in the 3rd/9th century. The north wing of this *ribat*, which must have had an area of 1,300 sq. m., was completely modified, and the monument underwent several enlargements of which four major stages can be marked out.

In the first stage, a pavilion, composed of a porch flanked by two columns supporting a semi-circular horseshoe arch, was added to the primitive entrance, separated by a small courtyard. This porch, recalling the one belonging to the Great Mosque of Mahdia (with hindsight), leads onto rooms covered in barrel vaults. On the first floor one found the prayer room composed of seven naves rhythmically divided by two bays and covered, with the exception of the central nave, by barrel vaults; the southern half of the median nave was covered by a surbased segmented sphere without squinches. Everything points to there once being a prayer room here whose *mihrab* was sealed up. Its architectural design evokes that of the early *ribat* which is situated along from it. This pavilion dates, according to a inscription in the Louvre, from the middle of the 4th/10th century; this succinct inscription refers to works carried out by Abu al-Qassim al-Tammar in 355/966, which seems to apply to this wing of the *ribat*. This pavilion, which would later serve as a *ribat* for women, is mentioned by al-Bakri in the middle of the 5th/11th century. This function explains why it was necessary to provide the *ribat* with a new gate, to separate the passage used by women from that of men. The present angled entrance of the *ribat* seems to date from this time. The decoration featured above its archway consists of five flat niches, surmounted by horseshoe arches topped by a floral frieze, an ornamental design characteristic of the Fatimid-Zirid style; one also finds it on the facade of the porch of the Great Mosque of Mahdia, on the east-facing facade of the Mosque of Sfax, and on the facade of the Sidi 'Ali 'Ammar Mosque.

The second phase of construction consisted of extending the north and east sides that dated from the Aghlabid era, an era that saw the consolidation of the monument via the building of square towers. Works undertaken in 827/1424, as indicated by a Hafsid commemorative plaque in *naskhi* script above the door of the angled entrance,

The Ribat, an upstairs room, Monastir.

increased the area of the fortress to 4,200 sq. m.
The third stage of the construction dates unquestionably from the era of Ibrahim Sharif Pasha in 1115/1704. It encompasses modifications undertaken on specific areas, such as the rebuilding of the east wing; turning the ground floor of the women's *ribat* into a prayer hall; adding polygonal towers to the north-west and south-east corners, as well as the circular tower of the north-east corner, all of which related to an armaments initiative.
The fourth stage, initiated by Hammuda Pasha (1195/1781–1228/1813) incorporated the building of a fortress and the decision of transferring students to the Zawiya of Sidi Dhuib. Similarly, Husayn Bey II restored and consolidated the *ribat* in 1250/1835. The bastions built at the north-east and south-east corners must date from this time. The lack of homogeneity in the appearance of the external walls of the fortress is due to the multiple consolidations staggered across the 11th/17th century and 13th/19th century.
Elsewhere, the prayer hall of the early *ribat* has housed a small museum of Islamic arts since 1959, whose exhibits include:
— a collection of funerary steles from Monastir that date from the 5th/11th century to the 9th/15th century, and whose inscriptions range from flowery *kufic* to *naskhi*.
— A collection of pieces of Egyptian textile, mainly Abbassid and Fatimid.
— Several Kairouanese works of bookbinding dating from the 4th/10th and 5th/11th centuries.
— Pages from Kairouanese and Egyptian copies of the Qur'an and manuscripts dating from the 4th/10th to the 12th/18th centuries.
Standing next to these latter exhibits are bronze objects, originating mostly from the Zirid and Fatimid eras, amongst which one can pick out a rare bronze chandelier from the Hafsid era, and Aghlabid and Fatimid ceramic plates.

VII.1.b **Sidi al-Ghedamsi Ribat** (option)

One reaches the monument via the route of the marina. During 2001 the site was in the process of excavation.
Situated on an island which is now re-attached to *terra ferma*, the *ribat* underwent various excavations that revealed the essence of the site, bringing to light its initial plan as well as the different phases of its extension. This island is named after a saint, originally from Ghdamas, who lived during the 4th/10th century, and who was buried on this site. The *ribat*, in fact, was erected in 257/871, by a wealthy Kairouanese, Ibn al-Ja'ad. Its construction reflects strategic considerations and demonstrates the necessity of securing more effective communications between the *ribat*s of the Monastir headland, through building a watchtower on the island situated at the tip of the headland.
The monument was built on the remains of Roman villas and mosaics. It is a square-plan construction, each side measuring 22.5 m. in length. Flanked by four circular towers at each corner, the centres of the two north and south walls are consolidated by two square towers used as cisterns, recuperating water from the terraces. One can clearly see the hallway and ground-floor rooms through the entrance on the eastern side. It seems that this *ribat* consisted of only one floor level, like the *ribat* of Lamta.

The Bourguiba Mausoleum is an example of contemporary, elaborately decorated, Islamic art.

VII.2 **LEMTA**

The town is situated half-way between Ksar Hellal and Monastir.

Originally a Libyc-Punic agglomeration, *Leptimus* is mentioned for the first time in the 4th century BC Allied to Rome. During the third Punic War, in 146 BC, it benefited from the status of a "liberated town" following the defeat of Carthage. Elevated to colonial status by Trajan, it became the principal town of the regional area of *Leptiminensis*. After the Byzantine Conquest, it became the home base of the Byzantium military command. Its renaissance dates from the Aghlabid period: from a simple *ribat* that served as a refuge to fishermen, Lemta became one of the most important ports of Ifriqiya. Nevertheless, it was supplanted by Mahdia in the 3rd–4th/beginning of 10th century. Around Lemta there is a salt marsh that, according to al-Bakri, produced fine-quality salt.

VII.2.a **The Ribat** (option)

Entrance fee. In order to visit the ribat*, you must first go to the municipal offices.*
Opening times: weekdays from 08.30–13.00 and 14.00–17.45, Fridays and Saturdays from 08.30–13.00. Parking available in the small square.

It was built by the Aghlabid Prince Abu Ibrahim Ahmad, in 245/860, and is the prototype *ribat* for *ribat*s with only one floor level. As opposed to Sousse and Monastir, which were important towns whose populations needed spacious fortresses in which to take refuge in case of an enemy attack, Lemta it seems was, during the 2nd–3rd/beginning of 9th century, a sparsely populated hamlet, which explains the difference between it and the *ribat*s of Sousse and Monastir, the latter two being more sophisticated and endowed with more crucial defence systems. Indeed, the *ribat* of Lemta did not possess a watchtower but was flanked at each of its four corners by a tower. Its prayer hall is on the ground floor, on the south side. Its very simple entrance is made up of a squat semi-circular arch which constitutes direct access.

VII.3 **SOUSSE**

Take the coastal route again. until you reach Sousse.

Founded in the 2nd century BC by the Phoenicians to serve as a base for their trading ships in the western Mediterranean, Sousse experienced a remarkable boom during the Roman era, distinguishing itself as one of Africa's main cities. Nothing significant occurred during the Vandal period or the Byzantine period, and this also applied to the first Muslim period. Facing the supremacy of the Byzantine navy in the western Mediterranean as well as the anarchy that dominated Ifriqiya throughout the 2nd/8th century, the Muslims decided to retreat inland into the country, while Sousse, which was composed of numerous hamlets, lived under the protection of its *ribat*, a sort of fortress

that served as a watchtower and refuge for its inhabitants. During the middle of the 2nd–3rd/beginning of 9th century, the Aghlabids succeeded in pacifying the country and becoming the new masters of the sea. They chose Sousse as their naval base and Ziyadat Allah I endowed it with a *kasbah* in 205/821 that encompassed the *ribat* and the naval dockyard where a military garrison were stationed; the whole compound was enclosed by a rampart. It was thus that Sousse was used as the departure point for the Conquest of Sicily in 211/827, reviving the conflict between the Aghlabids and the Byzantines, resulting in a series of clashes that have been well documented in historical sources. The threat of danger incited the Aghlabid princes to reinforce the defensive infrastructure of their base at which the most vicious assaults were aimed.

A new *kasbah* was built by Abu 'Abbas in 229/844; then, 15 years later, Abu Ibrahim Ahmed encircled the town with a freestone enclosure. Sousse then benefited from a time of relative peace, which favoured its growth and development. From being purely a military base, it rose to being one of the largest towns in Ifriqiya, serving Kairouan as the main maritime outlet.

Crafts were developed, particularly the weaving of fine materials, which was greatly admired abroad. The problem of supplying the town with drinking water was resolved through the rebuilding of the *sofra*, an ancient Roman cistern that had been turned into a prison during the Aghlabid period. A canal brings the water from the surrounding area to inside the town walls. The foundation of Mahdia in 304/917 by the Fatimid Caliph al-Mahdi, relegated Sousse to second place; Sousse suffered greatly under the siege imposed by the Kharijite Abu Yazid in 333/945. Nevertheless, it was able to pick itself up again due to its ideal location in terms of the economic geography of Ifriqiya. Throughout its history, and depending on political fluctuations, Sousse sometimes developed in direct relation to inland areas, whilst at other times it developed completely separately from it, but it always counterbalanced itself with maritime activities.

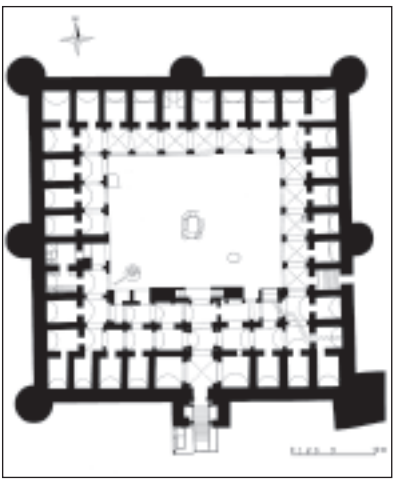
The end of the 4th/10th century and the beginning of the 5th/11th were notably periods of great urban growth. However, this prosperity was abruptly halted by the arrival of the Hilalians who ransacked the country. Sousse's fate slipped through the hands of Jebara Ibn Kamel, an Arab Chief allied to the Zirids. Cut-off from the rest of the country, it retreated back into itself, surviving only thanks to its maritime commercial trading links with the other ports of the Mediterranean. Like many coastal towns, it was annexed by the Normans of Sicily and dwelled under their domination for 15 years, until the arrival of the Almohads in 555/1160.

During 7th/13th century, the town benefited from the great attention paid to it by the Hafsids, who endowed the town with several monuments. But when, in the 10th/16th century, the Sultan Mulay Hassan called on the Spanish to help him reclaim his throne, Sousse rose up against the invaders and endured severe damage following two punitive expeditions.

The Turks, in restoring peace to the country, reclaimed the town. The 11th/17th century was marked by two events. From within, Sousse was deeply shaken by internal struggles that afflicted first the brothers Mohamed and 'Ali Bey from 1085/1675 to 1097/1686, then Murad III and his cousin Ramdan who had taken refuge in Sousse only to be persecuted and decapitated there

in 1110/1699. In the outside world, Sousse took part, as did most coastal towns, in privateering activities, rampant throughout the Mediterranean, and because of this was often the object of reprisals by European States, most notably France and Venice. In the 12th/18th century, during the rebellion of 'Ali Pasha in 1140/1728, Sousse sided with Husayn Ibn 'Ali's camp and was stage to various battles, until the final victory was won by the Husaynites in 1170/1757. In recognition of this, the Bey Mohamed accorded Sousse various rights and privileges. On the other hand, in the Revolt lead by 'Ali Ibn Ghdhahum during 13th/19th century, Sousse sided with the rebels. After this insurrection failed, General Ahmed Zarruk, sent by the *bey,* exercised a pitiful regime of repression over Sousse, whose importance suffered a continuous decline until the debarkation of the French troops in September 1881. By that time, it had been reduced to a town of merely 8,000 inhabitants.

The Ribat, corner tower, Sousse.



Plan of the Ribat of Sousse.

VII.3.a **The Ribat**

Leave your vehicle at the foot of the ramparts, on avenue Mhamed Ali, and walk about 100 m., via the "place des Martyrs".
Entrance fee. Opening times: 08.30–17.30 from 16th September until 31th March, and 08.00–19.00 the rest of the year. Parking available in the square.

The *ribat* faces the Great Mosque. This monastery-fortress was no doubt founded towards the end of the 1st/beginning of the 8th century, but was completely rebuilt by Ziyadat Allah I at the heart of the Great Fortress, *al-Qasr al-Kabir*, which he had erected in 205/821. A garrison composed of about 50 warrior monks, who had avowed themselves to the *jihad*, lived there permanently. This in particular, gave the army base a dual character, one that was both military and religious, that was manifested through the austerity of the building, the crampedness of the rooms and the choice of layout. The *ribat*, square in shape measuring 36 m. on each side,

The Great Mosque, kufic inscription mentioning the name of Mudam, Sousse.

built in stone, has been fitted out with a round tower in each corner except for the south-eastern one, where, instead, there is a square-base circular minaret of outstanding beauty. It was inspired by the prototype of Abbassid minarets that became popular across the Maghreb from the end of the 2nd/8th century. Semi-circular towers stand half-way across the walls except on the south side where there is a rectangular porch that precedes the sole entrance to the fort. This direct-access entrance, a form that preceded the elbow-shaped entrance which became common in defence buildings, appeared in Ifriqiya from the 3rd/9th century. The building's entrance seems to take after the entrances of the Abbasid palaces of Ukhaydir and Atshan, palaces that also heavily influenced the exterior architecture of Sousse's *ribat*. In all other respects, the *ribat* is a reproduction of the original plan of the Monastir Ribat founded by Harthama, the author of several similar military construction works found on the eastern front.

The *ribat*'s porch is surmounted by a defence feature consisting of a group of machicolations made of parallel stone openings or slits. Its pole-axes are surmounted by a domed kiosk on squinches, made of freestone, constituting the oldest specimen of its kind known to us. This allows for the study of the evolution of this prototype dome, which originated in the East, was adopted in Ifriqiya in the 2nd/8th century, and reached its maturity as the dome of the *mihrab* of the Great Mosque of Kairouan (3rd/9th century). The dome of the Ribat of Sousse constitutes an intermediary stage in its evolution, as it demonstrates by the direct transformation from octagon to circular skullcap. From the porch, one enters a square hallway covered by a well-bonded groin vault, appearing to confirm the survival of certain Byzantine and Roman traditions. The central courtyard is surrounded by four galleries, covered by a series of barrel vaults, whose arcades rest on freestone pillars. The north and east wings, rebuilt in 1134/1722, are covered by groin vaults. The ground floor is composed of 33 cramped rooms, covered by barrel vaults made of rubble. One reaches the first floor via a staircase that leads onto a passage used by rooms on three of the sides; the fourth side houses the prayer hall. The latter consists of 11 naves and two bays. The wall of the *qibla*, the same wall as that of the rampart enclo-

sure, is pierced with arches: the worshippers could thus transform themselves at any moment to soldiers of war in order to defend the *ribat*.
There is not a single element that expresses more eloquently the mixed nature of the *ribat* than this: it is an institution that is both simultaneously religious and military. After the confrontation between the two Mediterranean shores had come to an end, and the techniques involved in warfare had evolved, the military role of the *ribat* ceased, and the essential purpose retained therein was that of the spiritual. Several *ribat*s were transformed into schools in which the religious sciences were taught; in fact, the architectural plan of *ribat*s directly inspired that of Tunisian *madrasa*s.

VII.3.b **The Great Mosque**

This is 100 m. south of the preceding monument. Entrance fee. Opening times: 08.00–13.00.

The Great Mosque of Sousse was built by the Aghlabid Prince Abu al-'Abbas Mohamed in 236/851. It is quadrilateral in form (59 m. x 51 m.) and is composed of a prayer hall which is preceded by a courtyard. The latter, greater in width than in depth (41 m. x 26 m.) bordered by porticoes along three sides, also dates from the Aghlabid period. The fourth portico, situated on the outside of the prayer hall, is a later addition which probably dates back to the 5th/11th century, but which was completely restored in 1085/1675.
Along the top of the portico's facade runs a *kufic* inscription mentioning the name of Mudam, the freed slave put in charge by the prince to supervise the work. This inscription is the oldest epigraphic frieze decorating the courtyard of a mosque to survive. Unlike the majority of Tunisian mosque-cathedrals, Sousse does not possess a minaret; this absence can be explained by the proximity of the *ribat*'s vigil tower. Nevertheless, the call to prayer was proclaimed from the top of the north-eastern tower, which is surmounted by a domed kiosk dating from the Zirid period (5th/11th century).
The hypostyle room features 13 naves and six bays. It echoes the T-plan of the 'Uqba Mosque in terms of its median nave, which is larger than its lateral ones, and in terms of the dome in front of its *mihrab*, but differs from the 'Uqba Mosque in terms of its architecture. The naves are covered by rubble vaults rather than ceilings, which are reinforced by semi-circular beam arches, supported on robust pillars laid out in the plan of a cross. This prayer hall seems to have developed through three stages. It is probable that Abu al-'Abbas Mohamed proceeded to extend the oratory of Ziyadat Allah's *kas-*

The Great Mosque, prayer hall, Sousse.

Al-Zaqqaq, courtyard, Sousse.

bah in order to obtain a room to accommodate 13 naves and three bays, covered by barrel vaults. The three bays at the back, covered by groin vaults, were added by Ibrahim II in 247/862. The *mihrab*, however, is from the Zirid era, as is attested to by the decoration of the semi-spherical dome, which consists of a series of niches with semi-circular backs and bands covered in flowery *kufic* inscription circling the columns that flank the *mihrab*. These architectural and decorative motifs are taken from the Zirid repertoire. The prayer hall is surmounted by two domes on the same line as the median nave. The Zirid dome, in front of the actual *mihrab*, is simple and austere; it is surmounted by a hemispherical skullcap dome placed directly on top of a square drum. The dome's interior reveals the use of squinches, devoid of all decoration, encircled by archivolts that are linked together by arcatures. The second dome, which preceded the *mihrab* of Abu al-'Abbas, and is situated on the same level as the fourth bay, as counted from the actual *mihrab*, echoes the construction principles of the Aghlabid domes of the Kairouanese school of architecture. The circular smooth skullcap sits on top of a an octagonal drum-base on scalloped squinches which fits within two arches resting on small protruding pillars, themselves supported by small corbels. Horseshoe drafted arches, the backs of which are pierced with openings, link the squinches together. An epigraphic band of *kufic* writing unravels itself above it. The entire piece is supported on sculpted tympanum featuring floral decorations inspired by the Kairouanese decorative repertoire.

VII.3.c **Al-Zaqqaq Madrasa**

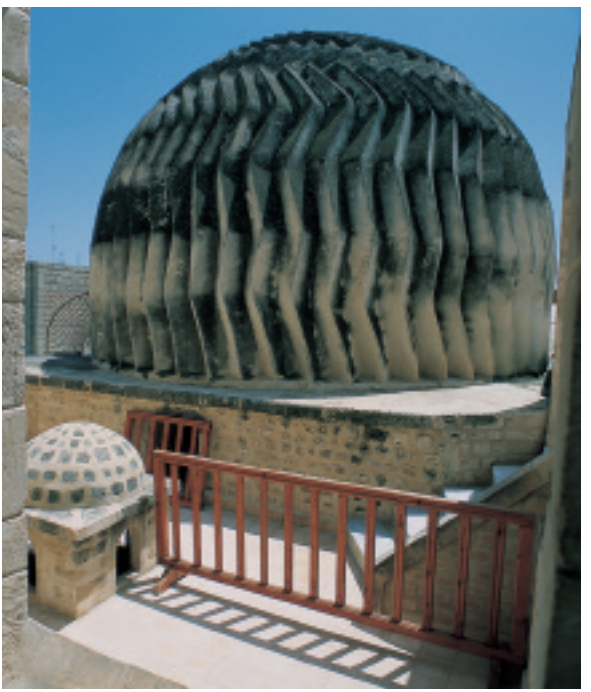
On exiting the mosque, turn left towards "rue Tazerka".

This monument consists of a cultural centre made up of a *madrasa*, a mosque and a funerary chamber. It derives its name from a pious man who lived during the 4th/10th century and who was buried in his own house which was later rebuilt as a *madrasa*. An entrance covered by a groin vault leads to a portico courtyard surrounded by students' rooms on three sides; the southern section was completely destroyed during the bombings of 1943. The mausoleum's dome, erected in the north-east corner, dates no doubt from the Husaynite era (12th/18th century–13th/19th century). Inside, the square drum features scalloped squinches at each corner, engraved within polyfoiled arches. The skullcap, made of pottery segments, is a form frequently seen in, and very common to, the Sahel region of Tunisia. An octagonal minaret, Ottoman in type (12th/18th century), rises up in the north-west corner; it is composed of three registers of flat niches, graced with polyfoil arches which are clad in *faience* tiles. It dates from the 12th/18th century.

VII.3.d **Qubba bin al-Qhawi**

Go down "rue Sidi Bouraoui" until you reach the covered passageway of "rue Mustapha Rezam" which ends on reaching the monument. The Bin al-Qhawi Qubba houses the museum of Popular Arts and Traditions of Sousse and its surroundings.
Entrance fee. Opening times: 09.000–13.00 and 15.00–17.30. Sundays open from 10.00–14.00. Closed Fridays. Toilet facilities available.

This very unusual and bizarre building dates from the 5th/11th century. It was most probably a funerary monument that contained the tomb of a religious or political personality of the town. The entrance porch consists of a drafted rectangular gate, surmounted by a sculpted, scalloped cut-out of a polyfoiled arch, opening out into three horseshoe archivolts framed by a serrated cornice. Flat or semi-cylindrical niches furnish the corner stones. On the right, eight niches in the shape of a *mihrab* embellish the facade of the external wall, above which rises the dome. This decor cannot but recall the lateral facade of the Great Mosque of Sfax of the Zirid period (end of 4th/10th century).
The inside of the building is composed of a square room covered by a vault with fluting



Qubba bin al-Qhawi, dome with zig-zagging furrows, Sousse.

Sidi 'Ali 'Ammar Mosque, facade, Sousse.

that radiates outwards. Archivolt squinches in the form of a scallop shell establish the transition between the dome and its square base. Triple archivolt recesses link the squinches to each other. One will note the evident analogy between this dome and the funerary monument called Qubba of the Banu Khurassan (5th/end of 11th century). On the outside, the skullcap dome is decorated with furrows rising up from its base to its summit. This decor evokes that of certain Almoravid domes, notably that of the Qarawiyin of Fez, that of Marrakesh, as well as the dome of the Mosque of Sidi Marwan in Annaba built in 424/1033. Everything points to the conclusion that it is a monument of the 5th/11th century, but the origin of certain decorative elements, especially the Z-shaped furrows, remains obscure. A *caravanserai* was added to the building relatively recently, probably in the 11th/17th or 12th/18th century; it was completely renovated during the 1980s and actually houses the municipal Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions.

VII.3.e **Sidi 'Ali 'Ammar Mosque** (this monument is not open to visitors)

From "rue Mustapha Rezam", enter the Rba'a Suq, then walk towards "rue de Paris", in the direction of "rue el-Mar", where the monument is located.

The *masjad* of Sidi 'Ali 'Ammar is distinct for its sculpted facade which breaks with the sobriety of the architecture of Sousse from the Aghlabid era. It is composed of two registers:

— The lower register consists of three horseshoe arches, the last keystones of which do not fall beyond the abacuses of the pillars, which is the first indication that the monument dates from the end of the 4th/10th century. The central arch, which is more elaborate than the others, with a protruding keystone, concurs with the entrance gate.

— The upper register consists of seven flat or semi-cylindrical niches; they are surmounted either by polyfoiled or simple arches or by triangles. Medallions featuring floral motifs and six-point stars calls to mind certain motifs on the porch of the Great Mosque of Mahdia. The whole is topped by a jagged moulding, like the one already seen in the dome of the Aghlabid *mihrab* of the Great Mosque of Sousse. The decor on the facade of the Sidi 'Ali 'Ammar Mosque is very characteristic of the Fatimid-Zirid repertoire, as attested to already by the eastern facade of the Great

Mosque of Sfax and the Zirid dome of the Great Mosque of Tunis. Everything seems to confirm that this mosque was built between the middle of the 4th/10th century and the beginning of the 5th/11th century.

Sidi 'Ali 'Ammar Mosque, detail of one of the flat niches, Sousse.

VII.3.f **Buftata Mosque** (this monument is not open to visitors)

Further south, head towards the end of "rue el-Mar" which ends in a sabat*, or covered passageway. The Buftata Mosque faces this passageway, in "rue al-Ma'aser" in the Bab Qibli neighbourhood.*

A beautiful *kufic* inscription sculpted in relief on the facade of the oratory attributes the construction to the Aghlabid Prince Abu Iqal al-Aghlab, who reigned from 223/838 to 226/841. The oratory is preceded by a barrel-vaulted gallery whose facade is recessed with three horseshoe arches. This design is almost unique within the Golden Age of Ifriqiyan architecture.

Buftata Mosque, kufic inscription on the facade of the oratory, Sousse.

Kasbah, general overview, Sousse.

The prayer hall, which is nearly square (7.85 m. x 7.70 m.), is divided into three naves and three bays; covered with barrel vaults which support beam-arches that cross at right-angles, resting on cruciform pillars.
The principle of three-nave oratories was adopted everywhere across the Muslim World, from the Atlantic right across to Afghanistan, without enabling its evolutionary history to be traced. The Buftata Mosque is one of the oldest examples of this kind of oratory to have survived. Although a princely foundation, this oratory lacks any element of decoration to distract the eye. The choice of such austere architecture thus seems to reflect an official line taken with respect to the urbanisation of Sousse, distinct for its defensive appearance. The architect of this mosque seems to have elaborated formulas that would later be applied, more forcefully and passionately, by the architect of the Great Mosque, built about 10 years later.

VII.3.g **The Kasbah and the Ramparts**

Return towards "rue suq al-Qa'id" and go back as far as Bab al-Gharbi. Turn left onto "boulevard Maréchal Tito", until you reach the monument. It houses the Sousse Archaeological Museum.

Entrance fee. Opening times: 09.00–12.00 and 14.00–18.00 from 16th September until 31th March. 08.00–12.00 and 15.00–19.00 the rest of the year. Closed Mondays. Parking available at the entrance. Toilet facilities.

Sousse's enclosure, which covers an area of 32 hectares, with a perimeter measuring over 2.3 km., was built in 244/859 by the Aghlabid Prince Abu Ibrahim Ahmed. Built of rubble-stone and occasionally of freestone, it is crowned with crenelations whose rounded form perpetuates the Byzantine tradition. The tracery of the ramparts seems to take after the Byzantine wall, some sections of which still exist. The enclosure was pierced by three gates: *Bab al-Bhar* (Gate of the Sea), *Bab al-Qibli* (Gate of the *Qibla*) and *Bab al-Gharbi* (West Gate). Three further gates were later built: *Bab Jadid* (The New Gate, in 1280/1864), *Bab al-Finga* (Gate of the Guillotine), and *Bab al-Jebli* (North Gate) between 1892 and 1895. During the modern age, certain sections of the ramparts were mended and rebuilt in order to accommodate pieces of artillery. The *kasbah* stands in the south-west corner, and was built in 235/850 by the Aghlabid Prince Abu al-'Abbas Mohamed; this fortress housed the military garrison and seat of the governor. The citadel was rebuilt many times, from the 3rd/9th century up until the present day, but its oldest part is without doubt the *manar* of Khalaf, named after the freed slave of the Aghlabid prince who supervised the foundation works: in fact it is as old as the foundation date of the *kasbah* itself. This signal tower, 30 m. in height, presents certain analogies shared with the Great Mosque of Kairouan by which it has clearly been inspired, and is an example of the diffusion of the Kairouanese School of architecture in the Sahel region. Composed of two levels accessible via a staircase built into the depth of the wall, the central cluster is served by four superimposed rooms covered in vaults of different shapes. This layout, previously unseen in Islamic art, would appear in Almohad minarets. Note that the construction of the Tower of Khalaf allowed for better control over the maritime coastline than did the Tower of Ribat; indeed, whilst the latter stands 27 m. above sea-level, the Tower of Khalaf stands 77 m. above sea-level, improving the view by over 13 km.

Ramparts, Sousse.