

| Tipasa, Beacon of Algeria's World Heritage

by Sabah Ferdi

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The presentation, conservation and interpretation of a complex site

The idea of heritage evokes something that has been handed down to us by our forebears. More concretely, it is also property that we have come to own either individually or collectively. It is therefore the visible sign of what links us to a place or a period of time: it is an asset which is the substance of our being. Today, heritage, whether cultural or natural, can no longer be surrendered, sold, abandoned or destroyed because its 'discovery' has made of our generation and our culture its inheritors and users, namely those responsible for its preservation and transmission to future generations.

In Tipasa, the human effort to subdue the world, which Ibn Khaldun speaks of in his *Muquaddima*,¹ has combined human enterprise and natural splendour so felicitously. The city of Tipasa, a melting pot and symbol of civilizations, had the ultimate courtesy to conceal its monuments and creations between the sea and the mountains, secluded among pine trees and olive trees and Mediterranean shrubs. In wandering through these vestiges, the visitor unrolls the

papyrus of our history and discovers how the inhabitants of our country strove to become integrated into their environment: that which, precisely, as Ibn Khaldun said, makes up 'civilization'.

From places of worship to funerary monuments, our ancestors left unique evidence of their technical know-how and their beliefs on this site. We can measure their capacity to integrate and multiply contributions of civilization during some of the significant stages of our country's history: from the ancient Palaeolithic age to the Punic age, Byzantine Roman times, passing through that of the Mauritanian kingdoms. To visit Tipasa is to encounter our people through its creations and dreams, communicating with our history. But it is also the key that opens the door into a garden of beauty that honours humankind, nature and creation alike.

Environment and typology of the site

The site of Tipasa is made up of three environmental ensembles: the eastern ensemble, where the city of Tipasa is located, includes the western foothills of the Sahel (Astian and Quaternary formations). The coastline features consolidated dunes with creeks and promontories located within the archaeological parks; the hinterland rises gradually into hills dotted with wadis; the central ensemble, made up of the Nador wadi valley, is a depression where recent, light material has accumulated. The western ensemble is formed by the Chenoua mountain range.

The natural setting of the site therefore provides a very suggestive landscape.

Archaeological vestiges stretch along a vast bay where the coast is sectioned into creeks, beaches and promontories with a blend of lush vegetation inland. The foothills of Mount Chenoua, in the west, complete the perspective of the site. Some 70 kilometres to the west of Algiers, the site extends over an area of approximately 70 hectares. It comprises two vast archaeological parks of monumental vestiges, partially excavated and visible, extending to the east and west of a long perimeter of ancient ramparts that demarcate a section of the coast between two promontories.

In the central section, the ancient city is still largely buried under a thick layer of alluvial sediment, varying from one metre to four metres in depth, on which stretches, up to the southern wall, a nineteenth-century village with simple dwellings laid out according to a clear and regular spatial framework. A landscape of hills and sea is visible from every part of the city of Tipasa. The museum, situated on the main axis, in the centre of the ancient city, is an 'Antiquarium', fairly typical of ancient sites in Algeria, and houses most of the objects unearthed by the excavations.

The perimeter of archaeological protection has preserved vast, non-excavated areas and also protected abundant Mediterranean flora. Tipasa, a unique ensemble of Phoenician, Roman, Palaeo-Christian and Byzantine vestiges, is considered to be one of the most remarkable and best-preserved Mediterranean sites, and, as such, was registered on the World Heritage List in 1982.

Tipasa: in search of heritage

When the city of Tipasa was promoted to the status of administrative seat of the *wilaya* (province) in 1984, there was a need for new services and facilities, therefore creating significant urban development and density. Consequently, the historic and cultural features of the city were not adequately taken into account and the opening up of new roads and districts led to the marginalization of the historic centre and the fragmentation of its periphery. Most of the new buildings were erected within sight of the designated buffer zone around the site. They detract from the unity and visual integrity of the landscape described by writers and poets.

The modern city of Tipasa has developed in confusion and structural imbalance, without regard for the layout and planning that the city has known since Antiquity. Seeking to preserve the historic city and its environment, the Algerian archaeological services in charge of its protection established, in collaboration with UNESCO, and working together with local authorities, a permanent plan for the protection and development of the site of Tipasa.

This plan for protection, that includes the archaeological parks and the traditional fabric of the nineteenth-century city, is structured along several lines. An initial focus involves collecting all documents required for an in-depth analysis of the site of Tipasa as a whole (the historic, architectural, sociological, geophysical and geomorphological data), as well as an assessment of the state of the traditional

site. The second focus aims at updating the topographical and urban service plans (roads, sanitation) of the Tipasa site in order to have a clearer understanding of the overall state of the site. Updating the plans was completed with photographic documentation and graphical surveys of all the buildings. Implementation of the safeguarding and development of the Tipasa site constitutes the final focus. Once these data had been brought together, they facilitated the development of a planning tool. The permanent plan of protection, which is based on historical information and urban space, proposes a framework which sets out regulations governing both the architecture as well as the rights of way for the buildings and ancient sites located in the historic nineteenth-century centre. This valuable tool, given the potential for innovation that it offers in terms of conservation and protection of a heritage site as a whole, was adopted by interministerial decree and was transformed, after municipal deliberations in 1997, into zoning regulations for the historic centre of Tipasa.

The project extends beyond conservation and protection for historical purposes to embrace a global, environmental, urban and architectural policy. This concern, therefore, reflects a significant planning approach. In the field, however, the project has revealed its limits because of the inadequacy of instruments² for safeguarding a site of archaeological, historical, cultural and sociological complexity. The Tipasa archaeological authorities have therefore launched a complementary analytical survey using a morphological and architectural method of evaluation (by establishing territorial, urban,

architectural and construction matrices). The diagrams that were developed are tools for the investigation and interpretation of the '*forma urbis*' of Tipasa. The maps of permanent and

history of forms, but it does facilitate understanding the logic of the establishment and transformation of Tipasa, in order to ensure it is adequately safeguarded.



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18. Roman amphitheatre in Tipasa. Tipasa was an ancient trading-post conquered by Rome.

changing aspects within the land and building development and maps of separate units henceforth constitute an outline for all interventions within the historic centre, from restructuring of the city fabric to restoration of buildings. The aim of this operation was obviously not to acquire knowledge of the

The Museum of Tipasa

The museum is a small, well-designed building, standing on the square overlooking the port. It was built in 1955 according to plans conceived by the architect in charge of historic monuments. It is composed of two exhibition rooms and a patio

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which visitors traverse before entering the main exhibition hall where display cases present a large collection of archaeological objects including Punic, Roman and locally made pottery, glass objects of exceptional beauty, ancient coins, gold jewellery, mosaics, sarcophagi and funerary inscriptions. Most of the collections on display come from local necropolises.

In addition to its conservation and safeguarding mission, the Museum of Tipasa is also a regional centre which disseminates information on the history of the site and the region. As the precursor in the development and application of the permanent plan for protection, it examines the building and development applications and grants the relevant visas in conforming with the plan. It is also the unifying force in the development and co-ordination of cultural events, and the programming, co-ordinating and supporting of all activities aimed at promoting the site according to urban and regional development strategy.

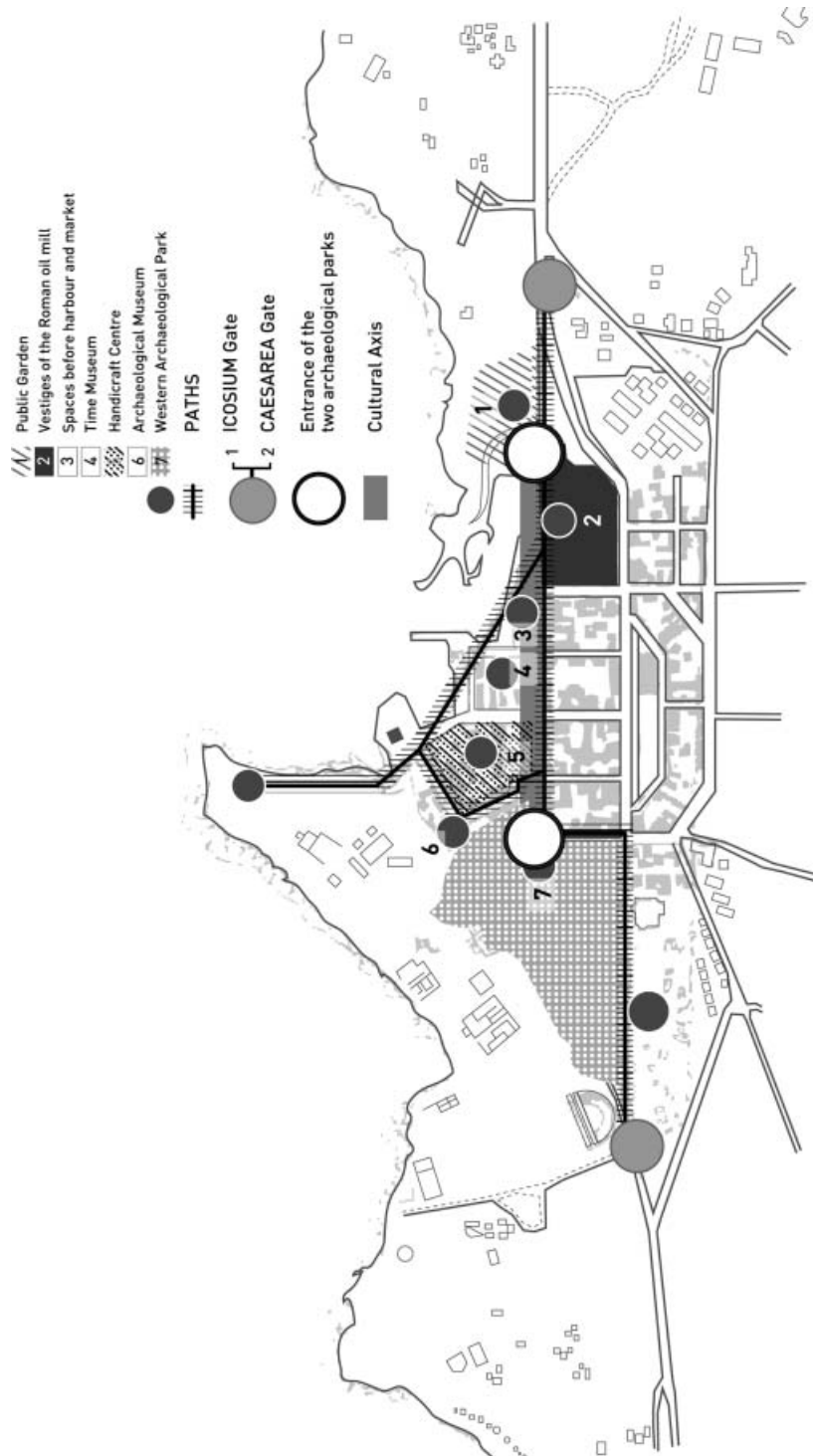
The project of development

The originality of Tipasa, the administrative centre of the *wilaya* region, deserves to be highlighted. It is a place where a modern city and a contemporary lifestyle are integrated within an archaeological site. Consequently, this site requires cultural and tourist development that does not isolate it from the newer city while protecting it from harmful effects. Such development should be articulated around three structuring elements: the Decumanus, the archaeofloral garden and the ancient wall. Many vestiges of the Decuman road which once crossed the ancient site are still visible

today. This road which traversed from east to west the two archaeological parks and the city centre of today deserves to be completely restored in order to highlight movement between these spaces. It would offer an overall view of the city and provide a natural border between the ancient city and the modern city, facilitating awareness of cultural and heritage tourism. This axis would be marked out by trees which would be lit at night.

In order to preserve the whole of the site from unplanned urbanization, it was suggested that the various sites should be organized into floral and archaeological parks where the public could walk along tree-lined paths around spaces where excavations need to be protected or would be undertaken in the future. This measure would prevent the unrestricted movement of visitors which is a cause of fires and the defacement of monuments. This solution would draw a clear separation between nature and archaeological vestiges while providing regulated access to the monuments. A system of ambient lighting would enhance the circuit. In addition to the horizontal axis of the Decuman road, that of the surrounding wall of the ancient city, located to the east of the modern city, would be restored by street lighting in order to create a second axis, perpendicular to the first.

It is through regional development that the question of the development of heritage and its integration in economic development can best be addressed. Development and protection are part of environmental policy and the conservation of the historic character of heritage entities is inseparable from social policy on housing. The protection of heritage is not only a job for



19. Map of the site of Tipasa in relation to the city.

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experts; the support of public opinion is essential. Citizens should participate in this endeavour ranging from the drawing up of inventories to the preparation of decisions. A genuine dialogue should be established between experts, public authorities, developers and the public. It is through dialogue that the importance and significance of heritage and its environment will be brought to light.

| NOTES

1. I. Khaldun, *Discours sur l'histoire universelle [Al-Muqaddima, Discourse on Universal History]*, Beirut/Paris, 1967. Re-issued by UNESCO/Sindbad in 1978, UNESCO Collection of classic works.

2. By safeguard instruments we mean: instruments for the investigation and analysis of urban layout and ancient buildings in order to develop technical recommendations for *non aedificandi* and *non altus tollendi* zones in the vicinity of monuments and vestiges, from the selection of architectural vocabulary, materials and colours for the rehabilitation of ancient sites and the construction of new schemes.



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20. Tipasa comprises a group of Phoenician, Roman, Palaeo-Christian and Byzantine ruins alongside indigenous monuments.