

The historic Sebou Basin: An asset of universal value.

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Abstract

The Sebou Basin, located in northern Morocco, stands as a cultural and natural heritage of universal significance, demonstrating the interplay between various civilisations and a rich environment. This region is home to prominent sites such as Banasa, Thamusida, Rirha, and Mehdiya, reflecting periods from prehistory to the Islamic and modern eras. Archaeological discoveries highlight cultural exchanges among Phoenicians, Romans, Mauretanians, and Islamic dynasties.

The Sebou River, a central pillar of the region, has been pivotal in fostering the growth of early settlements, trade hubs, and agricultural infrastructure since antiquity. This area also exemplifies harmony between natural heritage and human activity, housing protected areas like the Sidi Boughaba Reserve, renowned for its unique biodiversity and its role in environmental education.

UNESCO recognition would enhance the preservation of these treasures and promote sustainable development while celebrating a rich history where nature and culture interweave.

Keywords: UNESCO Heritage, Cultural Exchange, Sebou River, Natural Harmony, Sustainable Development.

Introduction

The Sebou basin in northern Morocco is a region rich in history and cultural diversity. It is home to major archaeological and historical sites, such as Banasa and Thamusida, which bear witness to a thousand years of history and the meeting of diverse civilizations, including the Mauritanians, Phoenicians, Romans and Islamic dynasties. This exceptional

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heritage, combined with the basin's natural wealth, offers a unique opportunity for enhancement and protection as part of a UNESCO World Heritage nomination.

The potential of the Sebou basin is based on several UNESCO evaluation criteria. Firstly, its sites bear witness to an important cultural exchange between different civilizations through the ages, a central criterion for recognition as universal heritage. Secondly, the preservation of these sites reveals a harmony between natural and cultural heritage, reinforcing their exceptional value. Finally, the basin illustrates the evolution of agricultural techniques and water management methods, which are essential to understanding the history of Mediterranean societies.



Figure 1. Map of the archaeological sites identified in the Sebou Basin and its tributaries. Source: René Rebuffat, *The archaeological map of Morocco*, *Les Nouvelles de l'archéologie*, No. 124, September 2011.

Recognition by UNESCO would not only provide greater protection for these treasures, but also an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of preserving this unique heritage, while promoting the sustainable development of the region.

The aim of this article is to shed light on this thousand-year-old heritage of the Sebou basin and its universal potential represented by several sites. The choice of these sites is part of a scientific approach¹ that takes into account various parameters, in particular the representativeness² of the different types of heritage that make up the historical wealth of the Gharb basin. These proposed sites do not claim to reflect the entirety of the region's

¹ This article is a scientific proposal aimed at highlighting the cultural heritage of the Sebou Basin.

² The Sebou basin and the Gharb plain are among the richest regions in the world in terms of archaeological sites discovered. As part of the Gharb archaeological mission, for example, more than 112 prehistoric sites, 735 ancient sites and 550 Islamic sites have been identified. These discoveries cover several localities, including Moulay Bou Selham, Lalla Mimouna, Arbaoua, Sidi Allal Tazi, Souq el Arba, Mechra Bel Ksiri, Kenitra, Sidi Yahia, Dar al Gaddari, Sidi Slimane, Khenichet sur Ouerrha, Oulad Aïssa, El Qansera, Sidi Qacem, Beni Ammar and other locations.

heritage, but rather to illustrate a significant part of it symbolizing its diversity and originality.

The Sebou basin is located in a strategic position: the Gharb plain³, considered geographically as a link between the north and south of Morocco, is an area that has been favorable human occupation since prehistoric times. The Gharb has important natural qualities, in particular the accessible topography and the abundance watercourses, in particular the Sebou and its tributaries: the Baht and the Inaouen. The area is also renowned for its large Mamora forest and wetlands, in particular the Sidi Boughaba, Marjah⁴ Zarqa and Marjah des Fouarat natural heritage sites.

The Sebou basin considered one of Morocco's richest areas in terms of heritage and archaeological sites. The region also boasts a rich prehistoric heritage, as evidenced by the rich material excavated in various localities, including Thamusida and Banasa. This material dates back to the Palaeolithic⁵ and protohistoric periods, including the funerary monuments of Sidi Slimane, Sidi Khelili, Sidi Mohamed el Mhid, Lalla Ghanou and others.⁶

This area encompasses the oldest urban centers in Morocco. These archaeological sites include ancient Mauritanian cities dating from the 6th century BC, in particular Banasa, Thamusida and Rirha. During the Roman period, the territory's main urban centers were very active and enjoyed great stability. The Romans equipped the plain with a defensive system consisting of military camps and watchtowers to protect the intense commercial activity.

During the medieval period and under various dynasties, the occupation of the territory expanded. Historical sources⁷ mention numerous towns and sites that formed the first nucleus of many Islamic metropolises, including al Basra, Asjen, Moulay Bousselham, al Mahdia, Ain Qarouach, and other towns such as Masna, Asâda, Masita or Masina, the locations of which have not yet been identified by archaeologists.

From the 17th century onwards, the Qasba of Mahdia played an important role in the history of Morocco. This fortress was built very close to the ocean entrance as a grandiose defensive work bearing witness to a glorious military past. In the 18th century, the Qasba of Moulay El Hassan, traces of which are still visible, became the first nucleus of the current capital of the area: the town of Kénitra. The urban centre of Kénitra underwent a great expansion during the protectorate, with the construction of the river port of Lyautey. The town is notable for its Art Deco architectural heritage and major modern urban amenities.

³ *Adrar*, also pronounced *Aẓerar*, is the ancient Amazigh name for Gharb plain, meaning plain.

⁴ Marjah in Arabic *المرجة* is a name that refers to marshes and wet expanses, one of the characteristics of the Gharb terrain.

⁵ The prehistoric material excavated from the Banasa and Thamusida sites dates back to the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic periods, as well as the Neolithic (polished axes).

⁶ Georges Souville, *Atlas préhistorique du Maroc*, 1. Le Maroc atlantique, CNRS Publishing, 1973, 368 p., Paris.

⁷ Major historical sources on the early Islamic cities of the Tingitane Peninsula (including cities in the Gharb, such as al-Basra), as well as on the geopolitical dynamics of early Muslim Morocco, include the works of al-Ya'qūbī (written in 889), al-Muqaddasī (died c. 990) and Ibn Ḥawqal (whose work was composed between 967 and 988). These authors were joined in the eleventh century by al-Bakrī, which also provides essential information on the political, economic and cultural context of the region during this period.

The Sububus as a factor of Civilization

Born in the confines of the majestic Atlas that Pliny the Elder described as “...*the most fabulous of all Africa...an immense and unknown space*”, this river is a giver of life.

None of Gharb's archaeological sites could have existed, and none of the region's history could have unfolded, without the presence of the Sebou, one of Morocco's greatest rivers. This navigable waterway, rich in fertile floods, is a veritable cradle of civilisation. It is the major vector for the foundation and expansion of centers of civilization and the development of commercial activity throughout the country.

The Sebou linked the Gharb plain to the Mediterranean trade routes via the Ocean. But more importantly, this river, renowned for its fertile and mineral floods, fertilizes the land with greenery and seeds. It is impressive to note that this aquatic link has provided the perfect conditions for continuous occupation since dawn of human history, and even more interesting is the density of sites and towns in its basin. Ancient historians, as attested by Pliny the Elder's natural history in the 1st century already knew this mythical river:

“Forty thousand paces from Lixus, inland, is another of Augustus' colonies, Babba, called Julia Campestris; and a third, Banasa, seventy-five thousand paces away, nicknamed Valentia. Thirty-five thousand paces from Valentia is the city of Volubilis, equidistant from the two seas. On the other hand, on the coast, fifty thousand paces from Lixus, the river Sububus, which flows next to Banasa, a magnificent and navigable river. Fifty thousand paces from the Sububus is the town of Sala, on the river of the same name, already close to the deserts and infested by herds of elephants and much more by the Autolole people, which you must cross to get to Mount Atlas, the most fabulous mountain in Africa.”

Location and components of the property

Banasa, Archaeological site

Located 65 km north of Kénitra and 17 km south of the centre of Machraâ Belqsiri, this Researchers know the site as a major trading post in ancient Morocco. Archaeological excavations carried out on the site have revealed material dating back to the prehistoric period.⁸

Archaeological research has also amphorae, lanterns and ornaments with Phoenician influences, indicating that the center had trade links with other centers in the Mediterranean basin prior to the 5th century BC.

Banasa was also very active commercially during the Mauritanian reign. Researchers have also uncovered many features dating back to the Roman period, such as the public square, the Roman temple and a group of buildings and houses with colonnaded courtyards and frescoed bathrooms, which can be considered among the most important monuments of

⁸ Rachid Arharbi, *La plaine du Gharb à l'époque maurétanienne: Archéologie et histoire (Contribution à l'étude la Maurétanie Occidentale avant l'annexion à l'empire romain)*, Doctoral thesis, Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Ibn Tofail University, Kénitra, 2021, 29-31.

Roman Morocco. Some archaeological finds dating back to the fourth century AD⁹ indicate the continued occupation of the site after the departure of the Roman administration. Banasa remained an active center until the 7th century and the advent of Islamic civilization in Morocco.



Figure 2. Aerial photo of the Banasa monumental complex (Forum and temple at Cellae). Source: Conservation of Banasa and Thamusida

Thamusida archaeological site

The archaeological site of Thamusida (Sidi Ali ben Ahmed) is located on the left bank the Sebou River, 10 km north of the town of Kénitra. Initial excavations (bibliography) carried out on the site revealed a Mauretanian center with remains of dwellings dating from this period, as well as material including several pottery vessels dating from the first half of the 2nd century. Recent research has uncovered traces an earlier occupation dating back to the period between the 6th and 3rd centuries BC.

From the Mauretanian phase onwards, the inhabitants of Thamusida established trade links with a number of trading posts on the Atlantic coast and with cities in the area around the Strait of Gibraltar, as well as with the Italian peninsula. This was demonstrated by various types of pottery and amphorae unearthed on site, such as Campanian ceramics and Maña C2b¹⁰ amphorae found in the foundations of the ancient city wall. After the annexation of western Mauritania to the Roman Empire in 42-43 AD, the city of Noumea was annexed to the Roman Empire. J.C., the town of Thamusida enjoyed a new economic boom, thanks to the presence an active port - as witnessed by the many remains

⁹ Rachid Arharbi and Éliane Lenoir, "Recherches archéologiques franco-marocaines à Banasa (Maroc)", *Les nouvelles de l'archéologie*, 124 | 2011, 21-24.

¹⁰ Akerraz Aomar. Les fortifications de la Mauritanie Tingitane. In: *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 154e année, N. 1, 2010.

amphorae¹¹ surrounding the plateau - which must have a landing point and a Roman supply center.



Fig. 3 Aerial photo of the Thamusida site, bordered to the north by the Sububus. Source: Conservation de Banasa et Thamusida.

Rirha, archaeological site

Located on the left bank of the Baht valley, 8 km west of the town of Sidi Slimane and around 35 km from ancient Volubilis, the Rirha site covers an area of around 10 hectares. The town is mentioned in numerous ancient sources¹² under the name of “Gilda”. This name is also found in archaeological material associated with the ancient site of Souk el-Arbaa and another site at Sidi Slimane.¹³ The Rirha site was occupied from time of the Mauritanian kingdom (5th century BC) to the Merinid period (14th century AD).

In the so-called Mauretanian period, an emerging urban fabric, numerous mud-brick structures, the presence of pottery activity and high-quality artefacts (imported and local ceramics, objects made of ivory or ostrich shells, Massyle and Mauretanian coins)¹⁴ all point to a settlement perfectly connected with Mediterranean trade and, more particularly,

¹¹ Amphorae dating from the 1st century BC to the 5th century AD have been discovered at Thamusida. This includes Beltran IIB, Dressel 7/11, Dressel 16, Dressel 2/4, Dressel 30, Dressel 17, Dressel 20, Beltran 72, African I and II and Tripolitan I and II (Gliozzo E., Cerri L., Damiani D., Memmi I, Amphora production and salsamenta trade: the case of Thamusida, Italy, 2005).

¹² GILDA was mentioned in Antoninus Itinerary, in Pomponius Mela's "Description of the World" and also in Claudius Ptolemy's "Geography".

¹³ Tegulae unearthed not far from the Rirha site mention the name Gilda, which can be compared with the Libyan GLD, itself close to Amazigh word aguellid meaning "king" or "tribal chief". At the village of Sidi-Slimane, a Libyan inscription has been found, a tumulus tomb dating from the 3rd-2nd centuries BC was discovered during the first excavations.

¹⁴ Laurent Callegarin, Abdelfettah Ichkhakh, Mohamed Kbiri Alaoui and Jean-Claude Roux, Stratigraphie et Bâti, in: Rirha : Site Antique et Médiéval du Maroc. II Period Maurétanienne (5th century BC - 40 AD), Collection de la Casa de Velazquez, Vol. 151, 2016.

with the region around the Straits of Gibraltar. It was around the turn of the Christian era, even before the Claudian conquest of 41-42, that Rirha adopted several signs of Romanity.



Fig. 4 General view of the Ensemble 1 production facility during excavations. Source: E. Rocca, Ch. Carrato, M. Kbiri Alaoui and A. Ichkhakh, Rirha (Sidi Slimane, Morocco). Mission report 2018, Casa de Velázquez, 2019.

Mehdia, Qasba (Fortress)

The Qasba is located on the left bank of the mouth of the Sebou River, 10 km west of Kénitra and 34 km north-east of Rabat. The Qasba of Mahdia is one of the Gharb's most important archaeological and historical sites.

The scene of several historical military events, this work bears witness to a style of Mediterranean architectural influence, in terms of its forms and components. Some research points to the possibility that the famous Phoenician centre of "Thymiaterion-Subur" was built on the same site at Mehdiya in the 5th century BC.

The Ifrenides or Béni-Ifrene, an Amazigh tribe, occupied it around 900 AD. According to some historical accounts, the town of Mehdiya was mentioned in historical sources around the middle of the 12th century, particularly during the Almohad period, and was renowned for its important commercial activity. The Portuguese established the fortress of Sao Jao Mamora in 1515, but their occupation did not last long. In 1614, the Spanish seized the site and named it "San Miguel Ultramar". Their occupation lasted 67 years until the town was liberated in 1681 by the Alawite sultan, Moulay Ismail, who gave the site the name of Mehdiya. The Qasba flourished under his reign and served also as the main residence of the local chief or Caïd representing authority in the region.



Fig. 5 Gateway to the Ismaili Qasba in Mahdia. Source: VisitRabat.com

Kenitra, Qasba (Fortress)

The Qasba of Moulay el Hassan is one of the most important monuments in the history of the city of Kénitra, and one of the few remaining Alawite Qasbas in the region.

Situated on the left bank of the Oued Sebou in a large loop, a few kilometres from the Atlantic Ocean, the Qasba is currently part of the Kénitra port domain.

Built in 1892, it was named after its founder, Moulay El Hassan, and formed the first nucleus of the town. At the beginning of the 20th century, between 1913 and 1919, after having housed the headquarters of the administration representing the Protectorate, the Qasba underwent transformations to adapt to its new function. It should be noted that Moroccan historians report that an older building, dating back to 1348 (749 AH) existed on the current site of the Qasba of Moulay al Hassan.

Al Basra, Idrissid city

The archaeological site of al Basra is located in north-west Morocco, 40 km from the Atlantic coast and 20 km south of the town of Qasr el-Kébir. It is crossed by national road no. 13, linking Souq al-Arbaa to the west and Wazan in Morocco to the east. The site is nestled in a flat area surrounded by wide plains bordered to the north by the front of the Rif mountain range.

In the 10th century, Morocco was the scene of confrontations, directly or through allies, between the Umayyads of Cordoba and the Fatimids. In 926, after being driven out of Fez, the Idrissids were able to retain power over certain territories in north-west Morocco, including the town al Basra. An expedition by General Jawhar, sent in 958 by the Fatimid caliph al-Muizz, established a small vassal Idrisid state whose capital was the town of al-Basra and which extended to the Rif and Ghomara.

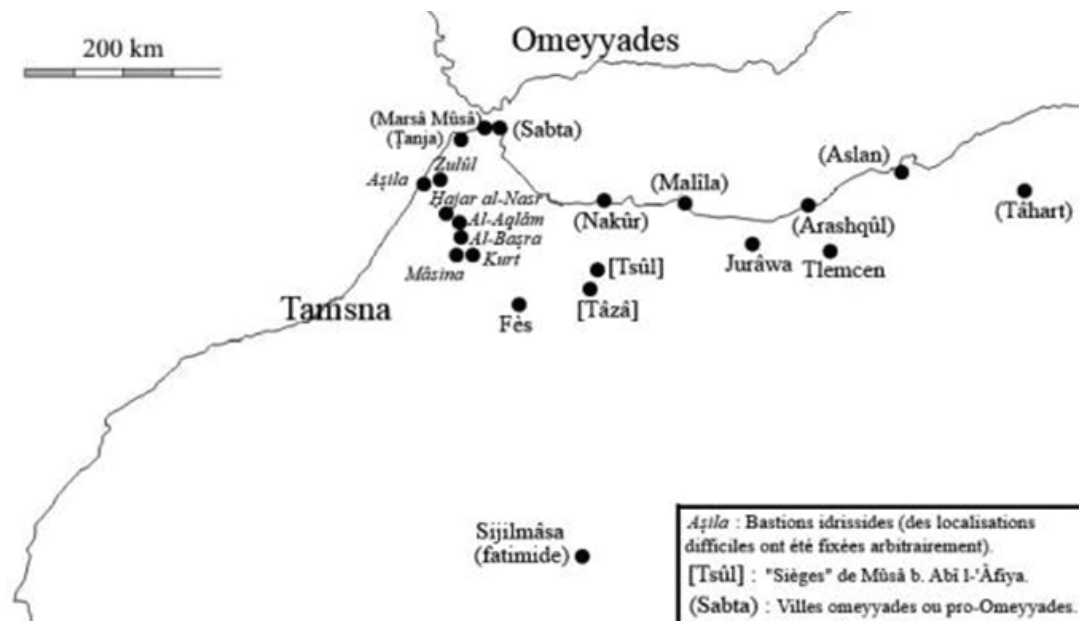


Fig. 6 Location of the town al Basra in its geopolitical context in the 10th century. Source: C. Benchakroune.

In 979, the Zirid leader Abu al-Futuh Yusuf Ibn Ziri, known as Bullugin, led his army towards Ceuta and had the fortifications of al-Basra destroyed before being repulsed by the Zenata and Andalusians of Ceuta.¹⁵

Historical accounts tell us “...al Basra had great Berber and Andalusian architecture...”¹⁶ and that it “...was inhabited by an Idrissid and Alawite population...”¹⁷ and that “there were more than 2,000 oil lamps in the city...”¹⁸ These historical accounts put great emphasis on the moral and ethical virtues of the inhabitants of al Basra, such as good conduct, moderation of character, exquisite beauty and inclination to integrity and knowledge.

It is possible that Morocco's name Basra was borrowed from the city of Basra in Iraq, as the existence of trade links between Basra, Iraq and Sijilmasa confirms Morocco's openness, since the first centuries of Islam, to influences from the East.¹⁹

¹⁵ D. Eustache, *Al-Basra, Capitale idrisside et son port*. Hespéris XLII, 1955

¹⁶ Ibn Adhari Abu al-Abbas, *Kitāb al-bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār al-Andalus wa-al-Maghrib*, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī. Tunis, 2013.

¹⁷ Abū al-Fidā' Ismael Ibn Ali, *Kitab Taqwīm al-buldān*, -Geography of Abulféda- Translated Arabic into French and accompanied by notes and clarifications by M. Reinaud. 3 Volumes, Imprimerie Royale, Paris, 1840.

¹⁸ Jean-Léon l'Africain (1956). *Description de l'Afrique*: Nouvelle édition traduite de l'italien par Alexis Épaulard et annotée par Alexis Épaulard, Théodore Monod, Henri Lhote et Raymond Mauny, 2 Vols, la Société des journaux et publications du Centre, Paris, 1956

¹⁹ According to Ibn Hawqal in his work *Kitab surat al-ard* (Configuration de la terre Introd. et trad., avec index, par J.H. Kramers et G. Wiet, Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale, 1966), there is a reference confirming the settlement of merchants from Basra, in Iraq, in the Moroccan trading town of Sijilmasa: "It was inhabited (i.e. Sijilmasa) by the Iraqi people, the merchants from Basra and Kufa and the merchants from Baghdad who crossed this road. They (...) and their caravans were uninterrupted for great profits and abundant blessings". Ibn Hawqal also mentions an Idrisid foundation of the city of al Basra. Ibn Adhari, on the other hand, refers to the appointment of Muhammad and his brother as governor of al-Basra after the death of his father, Idris ben Idris, in the year 213 (of the Hegira), which indicates that the city existed during the reign of Idris II. Ibn Adhari also tells us that Abu al-Futuh ibn Ziri, known as the Bullugin or Balkin of al Basra, destroyed part of its fortifications in 368 AH/978-979 AD during the last years of the Idrisid reign in the context of the conflict over the Maghreb between the Fatimids in Africa and the Umayyads in Andalusia.

The European city that was designed to meet all the attributes of modern urban planning, whether in terms of roads, architecture, morphology or housing, facilities, safety and mobility.

The town is bordered to the south by the Maamora forest, the largest sub-area in Morocco. On a wider scale, the town lies at the mouth of the Gharb plain and the Sebou basin, benefiting from rich agricultural land.

The Sidi Boughaba nature reserve

The Sidi Boughaba Ramsar site straddles the rural commune of Sidi Taïbi and the urban commune of Mehdiya, on the outskirts of the province of Kénitra. It lies on the left bank of the mouth of the Oued Sebou, 13 km south of Kénitra and 35 km north of Rabat. The site covers 650 hectares, including 100 hectares of lake and 550 hectares of forest. It is a major biotope and one of the most remarkable natural sites in Morocco. As well as providing a green and pleasant setting for nature lovers, it plays both an educational and ecological role.

The Sidi Boughaba reserve (also called Marjah in Arabic) includes an endoreic coastal lake, 6 km long and 300 to 800 m wide, located in an interdunal furrow to the south of the mouth of the Sebou. Its waters are brackish, with salinity varying considerably both in time and space.

The lake is surrounded by a matorral dominated by red juniper (*Juniperus phoenicea*), a plant formation considered to be the last vestige of the natural vegetation that used to cover Morocco's Atlantic dunes. This particular feature gives the lake its originality, distinguishing it from the other lakes on Morocco's Atlantic coast.

The Sidi Boughaba reserve serves as a stopover and wintering site for many migratory birds using the Atlantic route, and is also one of the best nesting sites, particularly for the Marbled Teal, a species that contributed to its inclusion on the Ramsar list. What's more, this biotope provides refuge for over 210 species of plant, as well as numerous species of mammal and reptile.

The reserve is under the supervision of the Agence Nationale des Eaux et Forêts (ANEF). Aware of the importance of preserving this biotope and its fragility, this department has established a delegated management agreement with the Société Protectrice des Animaux et de la Nature (SPAN) association. The site is also home to the National Environmental Education Centre. The site boasts such exceptional flora fauna that it has been classified as a national monument. Its ecological wealth and unique biodiversity have also earned it international status and classification.²⁰

The site of the Sidi Boughaba reserve also has profound historical and intangible values, bearing witness to the heritage of past civilizations and the cultural practices of the inhabitants who have always lived in harmony with this environment.

Traditions linked to the management of natural resources and the use of this area have been passed down from generation to generation, as evidenced by the constant visits by schoolchildren and students to this site, which has become an open-air biodiversity

²⁰ The Sidi Boughaba site is one of the Ramsar Convention's Wetlands of International Importance (six classification criteria), an Area International Importance for Waterbirds recognised by BIROE in 1964 and a "Biological Reserve" in 1974 by the Moroccan Administration of Water, Forests and Soil Conservation.

classroom, further strengthening the intimate link between the local population and their nature reserve. For the inhabitants of Rabat, Salé and Kénitra, this site is a popular place for nature outings, or “el Nzaha”,²¹ a moment of relaxation and conviviality that they consider an essential part of their experience and their social imagination. In addition, the nearby marabou of Sidi Boughaba lends a ritual dimension to the site, being a place of recollection and spirituality.

Status and legal protection of the property

The historic monuments, archaeological sites and natural sites of the Sebou basin benefit from legal protection to protect them and ensure their sustainability.

Components of the good	Legislation
Banasa	Dahir of 18 June 1930 - B.O. n° 925 of 18 July 1930
Thamusida	Ministerial Decree of 05 December 2001 - B.O. no. 4964 dated 27 September 2001
Rirha	Ministerial Decree no.° 2.01.1860 of 13 July 2001 - B.O. n° 4921 dated 30 July 2001
Qasba of Mehdiya	Dahir dated 02 March 1916 - B.O. n° 176 dated 06 March 1916
Buildings in the town of Port-Lyautey (20 th century Kénitra)	Decree of minister of Culture no. 2067.06 dated 28 August 2008 - B.O. no. 5460 of 28 September 2008
The remains of the ancient city walls of al Basra	Cherifian Dahir published on 13 August 1930 - B.O. n° 932 of 5
The Qasba Moulay el Hassan and its mosque	Decree of the minister of Culture n° 1783 dated 07 June 2018. B.O. no. 661 dated 16 July 2018
The “Canton Forestier de Sidi Bou Ghaba”	Ministerial Decree (Minister Plenipotentiary) dated 15 September 1951. B.O. n° 2033 of 12 October 1951. Administrative delimitation in 1916, area of 652 ha

Since the beginning of the 20th century, many archaeological sites, historic monuments and other heritage features such as those in the Gharb²² have been listed for their cultural and historical importance, well before adoption of Law No. 22-80 in the early 1980s. Although this law represented a major step forward in

At the time, the law had shown its limitations in the face of the new challenges of preserving, enhancing and managing our heritage. Bill no. 22.33, designed to modernize the legal framework and better meet today’s requirements, will therefore replace it.

²¹ The word “al Nzaha” النزاهة is from Moroccan dialect Arabic derived from the classical Arabic word “al noouzha” النزهة which means a relaxing outing or walk in a garden or floral environment.

²² Although the sites of Banasa and Thamusida, al Basra have been entitled protection status since the 1930s, other sites such as Rirha and the Qasba of Mehdiya were listed decades later

The new law introduces updated definitions incorporate internationally recognized categories of cultural, natural and geological heritage. It also provides for the creation of a national register to record the heritage, as well as the development of contractual management plans defining the necessary strategies, programs and funding mechanisms. This modernized framework will enable the conservation and enhancement of Morocco's heritage to be brought into line with the Kingdom's international commitments, in particular with UNESCO.

The criteria for nominating a property as universal heritage

Authenticity

The Sebou Basin sites constitute an authentic group of archaeological components that bear witness to a long and ancient occupation of this basin. It also represents an excellent object of study for assessing the continuities, changes and ruptures in the way of life of the inhabitants of the Gharb plain during Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the contemporary era.

The river, its basin and its alluvial plain are vectors of civilization, from the mouth to interior of the continent, the Sebou provided favorable conditions for the establishment of the first historical centers.

Thus, the archaeological components of the Sebou plain successively trace the installation of a network of centers and landmarks that later developed into towns and major urban centers. It bears witness to an authentic know-how attested to by different cultures and civilizations, and it is in the variety and specificity of each of its components that it tells us about the common landmarks of the ancient and medieval civilizations of Morocco.

Through its components, this historic basin reveals a harmony between human activity and the basin's hospitable natural environment (waterholes, shoreline, plant cover, fauna, game, raw materials for industries and crafts, etc.), allowing for the uninterrupted development and evolution of human occupation. The chronological and cultural sequence of these sites back more than 6,000 years to the present day. The succession of knowledge and the density of centers of civilization in the basin have enriched the intangible culture of the area and its people. The characteristics of the natural environment are rich and varied, but above all rare in the North African biosphere.

In short, the four aspects of this criterion can be summarized as follows:

- The authenticity of the materials: The nature, composition and typology of the archaeological materials of the property are scientifically attested;
- Authenticity of execution: the substance and architectural technologies emanating from the sites of the property reflect local and ancestral know-how;
- Authenticity of design: the property is rich in physical evidence reflecting values of use (founding of homes, maritime trade, military installations, conquests, etc.) and intangible values (expression, rituals, etc.);
- Authenticity of the environment (fidelity of context): the components of the property are closely related to the environment of the plain and its natural features.

Integrity

The property retains its integrity thanks to the four aspects of the authenticity criterion. It reflects the pioneering implementation of trade and urban development in Morocco and North Africa, and bears witness to a remarkable unity between its human and natural characteristics (sedentarisation, foundation of urban centers, ancient navigation of the river, etc.). The Sebou basin tells the story of the great harmony between the components of the property and their natural environments (towns, rivers, plains, pastures, river mouths, etc.).

Moreover, the guarantees on the conservation and preservation of the property are attested by the classification decrees, the decrees and the decisions of inscription of the components of the property and of a possible similar procedure for other auxiliary components. The guarantees on the conservation and preservation of the property are also confirmed by the regular monitoring of the state of the components, their protection, documentation and any other scientific mission carried out by the Department of Culture in Morocco, whose representatives are the Directorate of Cultural Heritage, the two Directions -Regional and Provincial- of Culture, the Regional Conservation of Cultural Heritage, the Conservation of the Banasa and Thamusida sites and other administrative bodies such as the Wilaya of Rabat-Salé-Kénitra, the prefectures, provinces, communes, departmental directorates and territorial agencies in Kénitra, Sidi Slimane, Souk Larbaa, Sidi Yahya and Sidi Kacem.

Outstanding Universal Value

The Sebou basin is one of the oldest centers of civilization in Morocco. It is a fertile territory in terms of natural resources and a hospitable cradle, favorably conditioned to human occupation from prehistoric times to the present day. Although this Basin opened up so early to the first trade led by the Phoenicians in the Mediterranean as early as the 7th century BC, it was not until the 4th century BC that the first political organization of the country appeared in this part of northwestern Morocco: the Kingdom of Mauretania. The Sebou Basin, at the heart of this genesis, was the site of a historic urban expansion and witnessed the birth of the Moroccan nation and civilization. The Romans were quick to grasp the importance of this basin for the economic security of the empire, which is why urban expansion increased enormously after the annexation of Mauritania to Roman rule.

The Sebou and its rich plains were to play a crucial role in the continuity of the country's history, and with the advent of Islam the Sebou provided the keystone for the various dynasties to control all four corners of Morocco. Today, this territory remains as vital and necessary to the country's economy, well-being and security as ever: an inexhaustible source of water and an abundance of greenery in an Africa of the Mediterranean.

North increasingly dry. The value of this area and the civilizational melting pot that it bears witness to is undeniable. The basin was influenced by a variety of civilizations that shared a common appreciation of the hospitality of the natural environment. This same value is reflected in the historical traces that it provides the history of its sites that tell the story of the successive and continuous passage of civilization. The nomination of the sites in this basin for inclusion on UNESCO's list of World Heritage sites is therefore an obvious choice. The designer of the proposal will not have to argue the importance of a

single site in Mauritania, but rather that of several! This is the case for Roman, Islamic and even 20th century sites, all of which have a common source, a natural and historical link: the Sebou river.

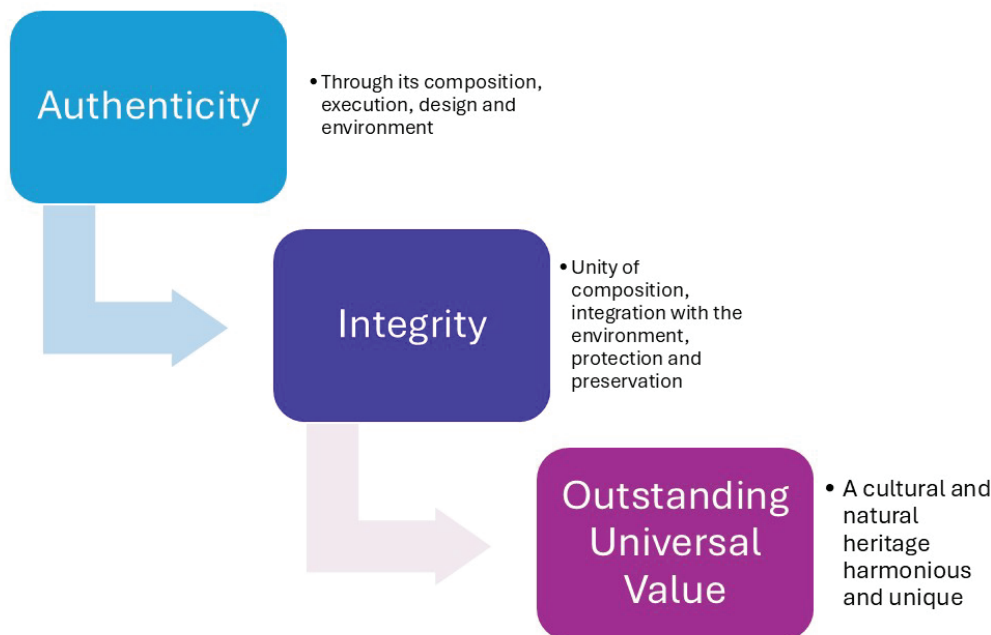


Figure 7. Graph illustrating the harmony between the criteria validating the classification of the Sebou Basin as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Conclusion

The Sebou basin, with its emblematic historic sites and natural landmarks, is a unique heritage that illustrates the interaction between different civilisations and their adaptation to an environment that is both rich and demanding. This heritage, at the crossroads of history, culture and nature, embodies universal values that deserve to be recognised and protected worldwide.

Nominating the Sebou basin for inclusion on UNESCO's World Heritage List would be an essential step ensuring the preservation of these historical and natural treasures, while highlighting their importance for humanity. Such recognition would not only strengthen local conservation and enhancement initiatives, but would also raise the international profile of the basin, the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra region and the Kingdom of Morocco, which has existed for thousands of years.

This proposal would be particularly well suited to the cultural and historic landscape formula, as it brings together a diversity of heritages - prehistoric, ancient, Islamic and natural -, which interact and complement each other to create an exceptional whole.

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