

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° 119 Rev.

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : The Old Town of Timbuktu

Location : 6th Region

State Party : Mali

Date : December 22, 1987

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That only the three great mosques of Timbuktu be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria II, IV and V.

C) JUSTIFICATION

In 1980 the World Heritage Committee deferred the proposal for inclusion of the town of Timbuktu on the World Heritage List, expressing the wish that the Republic of Mali draw up an inventory of surviving monuments, determine the demarcation of a protective perimeter and specify the measures adopted for the conservation of a noteworthy but fragile group of buildings threatened by dangers as diverse as sand drifts and urban development.

Timbuktu is one of those cities of Africa whose very name brims with legend and history. The city is thought to have been founded toward the end of the 5th century of the Hegira by a group of Imakcharen Tuaregs who, having wandered 250 km south of their base, established a temporary camp guarded by an old woman, Buktu. Gradually, Tim-Buktu (the place of Buktu) became a small sedentary village at the crossroads of several trade routes.

Quickly converted to Islam -the two great mosques of Djingareyber and Sankore appeared during the Mandingue period- the market city of Timbuktu reached its apex under the reign of the Askia (1493-1591). It then became an important centre of Koranic culture with the University of Sankore and numerous schools attended, it is said, by up to 25,000 students.

Scholars, engineers, and architects from various regions in Africa rubbed shoulders with wise men and marabouts in this intellectual and religious centre. Early on, Timbuktu attracted travellers from far-away countries. From Ibn Battuta in 1350 to René Caillié in 1828, many of them passed through or sojourned for a while.

From this prestigious past, only a few, rare architectural vestiges have survived Timbuktu's troubled contemporary history. Religious monuments remain the essential elements of reference in the present city.

Although the mosques of El-Hena, northwest of the market, Kalidi, inside the Moroccan casbah, and Algoudour Djingareye, in the Sareikaina quarter, have been destroyed, three essential monuments -the mosque of Djingareyber, the mosque of Sankore and the mosque of Sidi Yahia- fortunately still stand as testimony to the grandeur of Timbuktu.

The mosque of Djingareyber was built by the sultan Kankan Moussa after his return in 1325 from a pilgrimage to Mecca. Between 1570 and 1583 the Qadi of Timbuktu, Imam Al Aqib, had it reconstructed and enlarged, adding the whole southern part and the wall enclosing the graveyard situated to the west. The central minaret dominates the town and is the most visible landmark of the urban landscape. A smaller minaret on the eastern facade completes the profile of the Great Mosque which has three inner courtyards.

Like the mosque of Djingareyber, the mosque of Sankore, built during the Mandingue period, was restored by the Imam Al Aqib between 1578 and 1582. He had the sanctuary demolished and rebuilt it according to the measurements of the Kaaba at Mecca which he had taken with a rope during his pilgrimage there.

The mosque of Sidi Yahia, south of the mosque of Sankore, was probably built around 1400 by the marabout Shiek El Moktar Hamalla in anticipation of a holy man who appeared 40 years later in the person of Cherif Sidi Yahia, who was then chosen as Imam. The sanctuary was restored in 1577-1578 by the Imam Al Aqib.

Aside from the mosques, the nomination enumerates 16 cemeteries and mausoleums, essential elements in a religious system since, according to popular belief, they constitute a rampart that shields the city from all misfortune. The most ancient mausoleum is that of Shiek Abul Kassim Attouaty, who died in 936 of the Hegira (1529) and was buried 150 m west of the city with 50 ulemas and holy persons from Touat. Equally noteworthy and from the same general period are the graves of the scholar Sidi Mahmoudou, who died in 955 of the Hegira (1548) and of Qadi Al Aqib, the restorer of mosques, who died in 991 of the Hegira (1583).

Having carefully examined the different components of the architectural and urban heritage of Timbuktu, its ramparts, Moroccan casbah, markets and houses (traditional houses like that of Muhamed Bagayoko, Imam Essayoute, and Muhamed Essakly or houses linked to the great travellers of the 19th century like Gordon Laing, René Caillié, Heinrich Barth and Oskar Lenz), ICOMOS has decided that the inclusion on the World Heritage List would be more justified were the nomination entitled "Mosques, Cemeteries and Mausoleums of Timbuktu", or in a more restrictive manner, simply "Mosques of Timbuktu".

ICOMOS would be in favor of such a nomination on the basis of criteria II, IV and V.

- Criterion II. The mosques and holy places of Timbuktu played an essential part in the spread of Islam in Africa at an early period.
- Criterion IV. The three great mosques of Timbuktu, restored by the Qadi Al Aqib in the 16th century, bear witness to the golden age of the intellectual and spiritual capital at the end of the Askia dynasty.
- Criterion V. Built of banco except for some limited repairs (the minaret of the mosque of Sidi Yahia in 1939, the alhor stone facework on the eastern facade of the mosque of Sankore in 1952), the mosques of Timbuktu are more representative than the more extensively remodeled dwellings of traditional construction techniques that have become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.

Observations of ICOMOS

The city of Timbuktu in its entirety, such as defined in the nomination, will obviously have to be protected in order to prevent the deterioration of the traditional buildings and the incorporation of contemporary structures which have already irreparably altered the ancient land parcels.

Furthermore, the international community will have to take heed of the risk of the encroaching sand dunes that threaten the whole city. The mosque of Sankore, fully cleared of sand in 1952, is once again nearly buried. As the nomination tragically concludes, "the living dunes threaten Timbuktu just as the waters threatened to engulf Abu Simbel".

ICOMOS, May 1988

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