

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° 116 Rev.

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : The Ancient Towns of Djenne

Location : 5th Region

State Party : Mali

Date : December 22, 1987

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

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

C) JUSTIFICATION

Like Timbuktu, the city of Djenne was nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List by the Republic of Mali in 1979. In 1980, on a recommendation by ICOMOS, the Committee deferred examination of the dossier, requesting that further details be provided concerning the urbanization of the site as well as the measures taken to protect the old buildings and quarters. Noting the loss of authenticity due to the rapid and chaotic transformation of the city, the Committee brought up the possibility of the city's being included on the World Heritage List in Danger.

In 1982 the expert sent to Mali for the Convention proposed broadening the nomination to include the archaeological site of Djenne-Djeno and that the cultural property be called "the ancient towns of Djenne".

Subsequently, a group of experts meeting in 1986 at ICOMOS recommended that, by taking Djenne along with its surrounding landscape of tells and swamps, typical of the inland delta of the Niger, a property more vast than the present urban group would be defined and a coherent ensemble formed.

The seminar at Bamako retained the idea of "ancient towns of Djenne" (Djenne and Djenne-Djeno) by opting for wider protection that would help conserve archaeological reserves.

This year the government of Mali has submitted a nomination based on these principles.

The annual flooding by the Niger and its tributaries is an essential natural phenomenon in both the region of Djenne and the whole inland delta area. The floods cover all but some hillocks; these are called toguere. Excavations carried out from 1977 to 1981 by Susan Keech and Roderick J. McIntosh on the toguere of Djenne-Djeno, in the flood basin of the Bani, 3 km southeast of Djenne, produced evidence of continuous human occupation from 250 B.C. to the 14th century.

Several phases of occupation were brought to light. There was a pre-urban phase, when the Bozo people made their living from fishing and growing rice. An urbanization phase was probably due to the Nono people. Under Nono merchants the city quickly became a market centre and a hub in the trans-Saharan gold trade, which began in the 9th or 10th century in western Africa in answer to Muslim demand. The discovery of many domestic structures -walls, houses, the remains of ovens- and a wealth of metal and terra cotta artifacts make Djenne-Djeno a major archaeological site for the study of the evolution of dwellings, industrial and craft techniques and the spread of Islam.

The discovery of organic remains, among which were a large number of African rice grains, shed much light on how the cultivation of rice developed. Other toguere, such as at Hambarketolo, Tonomba and Kaniana, also revealed important discoveries. All these tells, which were a natural refuge from the flood waters, are potential archaeological sites and on that basis deserve to be protected.

In the 14th century Djenne-Djeno was abandoned in favor of Djenne, which had been inhabited since the 11th century. The story of the sacrifice of atonement of a young girl, Tepama, who was walled up alive in order to ensure the town's prosperity, must be placed in the religious context of a time when animistic beliefs and fetichism had not yet given way to Islam. Introduced by Marka merchants, Islam did not take hold until the end of the 13th century when the sultan Koumboro was converted. He abandoned his palace and turned it into Djenne's first mosque; it was destroyed in 1830.

Like Timbuktu, Djenne enjoyed its golden age during the 15th and 16th centuries. At that time it was a major centre for the spread of Islam. Taken first by the Moroccans in 1591, and subsequently by the Peulhs in 1810, the Toucouleurs in 1862, and finally by the French colonial troops in 1893, Djenne did not undergo any other period of major development until Mali won its independence.

The colonial period left deep traces on the city, notably through the reconstruction in 1906-1907 of the Great Mosque. However, this monument, which was built for 3000 worshippers, is a fairly successful pastiche of local religious architecture.

The city of Djenne, which spreads over several togueres, is bisected by a wide avenue. On the south is the Market Place dominated by the Great Mosque. Extending out from both sides of this thoroughfare, over an ancient land parcel of about 20 hectares, are about 1850 traditional houses (1982 figure). The main feature of the domestic architecture, influenced by that of Morocco, is its verticality. Buttresses punctuate the facades of the two-story houses whose entrances are always given special attention. Beyond this historic nucleus are contemporary buildings, dating from successive extensions of the city limits.

Special mention should be made of the ports of Djenne - 17 are indicated on the map included in the dossier- particularly the one at Bambana, where pirogues from Timbuktu would tie up.

ICOMOS recommends that the ancient towns of Djenne be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria III and IV.

- Criterion III. Djenne-Djeno, along with Hambarketolo, Tonomba and Kaniana, bears exceptional witness to the pre-Islamic civilizations on the inland delta of the Niger.

- Criterion IV. Djenne is an outstanding example of an architectural group of buildings illustrating a significant historic period. It has been defined both as "the most beautiful city of Africa" and "the typical African city".

Observations of ICOMOS

It seems that Djenne has a true desire to conserve its heritage. It has skillful and highly reputable masons who can pass on architectural knowhow and traditions.

The real problem, however, lies in population growth and real estate speculation. Under these conditions, the definition of a large zone of protection can only help Malian authorities to control urban development and conserve the archaeological reserves and the natural site of the inland delta.

ICOMOS, May 1988

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The real problem, however, lies in population growth and real estate speculation. Under these conditions, the definition of a large zone of protection can only help Malian authorities to control urban development and conserve the archaeological reserves and the natural site of the inland delta.

It would be useful to recommend that the existing balance between built-up areas and open spaces be respected in building zones.

ICOMOS, July 1988