

Ruins of Loropéni (Burkina Faso)

No 1225

*Official name as proposed
by the State Party:*

The Ruins of Loropéni

Location:

Province of Poni

Brief description:

The imposing, tall, laterite stone walls, up to six metres in height, surrounding a large abandoned settlement near Loropéni are the best preserved of ten similar fortresses in the Lobi area, part of a larger group of around a hundred stone-built enclosures. They appear to reflect the power and influence of the trans-Saharan gold trade and its links with the Atlantic coast. Recent excavations have provided radio-carbon dates suggesting the walled enclosure at Loropéni dates back at least to the 11th century AD.

The Loropéni fortress was probably built by Lohron or Koulango peoples, who controlled the extraction and the transformation of gold. They are the ancestors of the present day Touna chiefs. The area is now mostly occupied by Gan (in the West) and Lobi (in the East).

Category of property:

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

1. BASIC DATA

Included in the Tentative List: 9 April 1996

*International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund
for preparing the Nomination:* 5 April 2004
9 March 2007

*Date received by
the World Heritage Centre:* 31 January 2005
23 January 2009

Background: This is a referred back nomination (30 COM, Vilnius, 2006).

A first nomination dossier for The Ruins of Loropéni was examined by the World Heritage Committee at its 30th session (Vilnius, 2006). At the time, ICOMOS recommended to defer the examination of the nomination in order to allow the State Party to:

- *Explore further the values and significance of the site through surveys and targeted excavations of the ruins and their hinterland, to establish the role and function of Loropéni and its association with trade across the Sahara and towards the West African coast;*

- *Gather existing research on Loropéni and ruin in the wider Lobi area to strengthen understanding of the relationship between Loropéni and other fortified settlements in the Lobi area;*

- *Formulate a detailed project to stabilise the walls of the Loropéni ruin and suggest how this might be funded.*

The World Heritage Committee adopted the following decision (30 COM 8B.31):

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Having examined Documents WHC-06/30.COM/8B and WHC-06/30.COM/INF.8B.1,*
2. *Refers the nomination of the Ruins of Loropéni, Burkina Faso, back to the State Party in order to:*
 - a) *Explore further the values and significance of the site through surveys and targeted excavations of the ruins and their hinterland, to establish the role and function of Loropéni and its association with trade across the Sahara and towards the West African coast;*
 - b) *Gather existing research on Loropéni and ruins in the wider Lobi area to strengthen understanding of the relationship between Loropéni and other fortified settlements in the Lobi area;*
 - c) *Formulate a detailed project to stabilize the walls of the Loropéni ruin and suggest how this might be funded.*
3. *Recognizes that it is desirable that the Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Centre assist the State Party in undertaking the tasks mentioned in paragraph 2 above.*
4. *Invites the State Party to submit an international assistance request to support the work required and to provide the information requested.*

On 23 January 2009, the State Party submitted supplementary information demonstrating how the requests of the Committee had been met. This information is incorporated into this report.

Consultations: ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management.

Literature consulted (selection):

Savonnet, G., "Le paysan Gan et l'archéologie ou Inventaire partiel des ruines de pierres du pays lobi-gan (Burkina et Côte d'Ivoire)", *Cahiers des Sciences Humaines* (ORSTOM), vol 22, 1986.

Père, Madeleine, *Le royaume Gan d'Obiré, Introduction à l'histoire et à l'anthropologie du Burkina-Faso*, Paris, 2005.

Technical Evaluation Mission: 19-26 September 2005. As this is a referred back nomination, no further mission has been undertaken.

Additional information requested and received from the State Party: None

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report: 10 march 2009

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

The almost square Ruins of Loropéni encompass a large settlement some 2 km to the north west of Loropéni, in the comparatively flat landscape near Gaoua in the south-west of Burkina Faso, near the borders with Togo and Ghana.

The nominated area covers the walls and the space within, some 105 by 106 metres, an area of 11,130 sq metres. The site is surrounded by a large buffer zone of arable and forest land between the roads from Loropéni to Banfora in the west and to Obiré in the north-west, in all extending to 278.40ha. The ruins are one of over a hundred in the area and the best preserved.

The site is overgrown, which gives it an area of mystery added to by legends which explain its abandonment. At the time of the original nomination it was stated that 'there was no certainty over its history; the settlement has not been recently excavated and oral and written traditions have so far proved inconclusive. The debate it was said continues as to whether the ruins were associated with the Gan people or perhaps the Koulango who preceded them in this area'.

It was further stated that 'Whoever built this settlement, and many others in the area, seem to have been involved in the southern part of the trade in gold from the gold fields in Ghana to the Sahelian towns of Mopti, Djenné, Timbuktu. The fortifications may reflect conflict between states controlling the gold trade and the predations of slave traders from the south'.

The ICOMOS evaluation report suggested that archaeological excavations could provide evidence to help understand the genesis of the ruins. In the intervening two and a half years a major interdisciplinary research project has considered the archaeological, oral history, historical and botanical associations of Loropéni and its associated stone structures. This work was undertaken under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and executed by a scientific team under the supervision and the coordination of Professor Jean-Baptiste Kiéthéga of the University of Ouagadougou. Although the team considered that the time allowed for the research was too little in relation to the task, the work has allowed a better understanding of the genesis of the structure, its development, later use and possible connections to the gold trade. Excavation took place over 45 days. 11 small discrete areas within the enclosure were identified for excavation and all but two were explored.

Overall a synthesis has been provided of the current state of knowledge of the history and use of the ruins, drawing

together the archaeological results, a trawl of previous descriptions from the early 20th century, other published information and oral history.

Excavation finds including coal and pottery made it possible to establish the first references for the dating of the site. Results of radiocarbon dating indicate the structure was in place in the 11th century and flourishing from the 14th to the 17th century which gives the site a much longer history than had been previously suspected.

The finding of the superimposition of certain structures proves several periods of use and several modifications in the plan. It is still not possible to know precisely how the building was used and associations with the gold trade were not proved by the excavations but nevertheless they remain a strong assumption – see history below. A programme of further excavations is planned.

The site consists of:

- External walls;
- Remains of internal partition walls;
- Traces of buildings within the walls;
- Remains in the buffer zone;
- Associations with the gold trade.

These are considered in turn:

External walls

The Ruins of Loropéni are part of a complex of over 100 ruins in an area known today as Lobi country distributed between Burkina Faso, Ghana and the Ivory Coast. These ruins are divided into two principal groups, one with circular plans, and the other with square or rectangular plans. The circular ruins were initially thought to be the older and were identified with Koulango people, whereas those of square form were thought to be more recent and related to the Gan people who moved into the area and displaced the Koulango. However recent investigations have challenged this thesis.

The majority of the ruins display only vestiges of what once existed, with walls seldom higher than a metre. Around Loropéni there are ten fortresses of a similar type. The Ruins of Loropéni are the best preserved with the principal external walls rising in place up to 6 metres in height. The site is called *Kpôkayâga* by Gan people, which means "the house of refusal" apparently reflecting the rejection of the site, following the premature death of a ruler who lived in this fortified settlement. Because of this, it has remained abandoned and unexploited and as a result its archaeology is probably intact. This is in drastic contrast to many of the other sites which have continued to be used as dwellings or for cultivation.

At Loropéni, the ruins are almost square in plan with the lengths of the peripheral walls varying between 105 and 106 m. They enclose an area of approximately 11,130 square metres. Around 80% of the external walls survive rising to some 6 metres in height. The thickness of the

walls varies considerably from 1.40 metres at the base to between 25 and 30 cm at the apex. The walls when built seem to have been almost perfectly rectilinear. Irregularities are now visible due to the impact of trees and settlement of the ground. The wall corners are of rounded form, inside as well as out. There is no convincing sign of any access gate.

The walls are built of shaped, rounded, or occasionally ovoid stones, laid in a mud mortar, strengthened with shea honey and butter. On the lower inner and outer faces the stones are laid in courses with a rubble core. The top parts of the walls are made of shaped rubble alone, a technique known as *bauge*. In places small pieces of ceramic have been inserted in the mortar. There is evidence that the faces of the walls were plastered both inside and out.

The materials were probably extracted not far from the enclosure. The blocks of stones could have been cut from the many outcrops of laterite near the enclosure, in the East and the South. Two places of possible extraction were identified in the recent survey, one to the West, and the other to the East of the ruin.

Remains of internal partition walls

Within the external walls are the remains of two main dividing walls running in parallel across the space.

Although metal objects were recovered in the northern part of the site, no metal objects were found in the southern compartment. It is suggested that if more complete excavations confirmed this difference, it could be possible to speculate that this southern compartment, separated from the northern compartment by a wall as high as that of the perimeter wall, could, at least for a period of time, have been the dwelling place of slaves.

Traces of buildings within the walls

Within the three compartments created by the dividing walls can be seen traces of about twenty rectilinear structures, also with rounded corners. In some places their walls rise to 3 metres; elsewhere they can only be traced at ground level.

In several places can be discerned groups of compartments, an 'open' compartment having of three surrounding walls between two closed structures, with no apparent door.

The recent excavations attempted to find the doorway to the complex but it was not possible to identify formally a way-in. The possibility of ladder access, as still exists in certain local traditional buildings, will be investigated in the future. Similarly the excavations failed to identify a water supply.

The excavations did make it possible to highlight the role of certain buildings as dwellings, as spaces were identified as being rooms, stores or kitchens.

Remains in the Buffer zone

Within the buffer zone are several remains of buildings, both circular and rectangular, one site linked to a row of

stones some 1km long. A few have domestic remains such as grind-stones, and there is also evidence of iron working and stone quarrying. These remains were surveyed as part of the recent project. Some could be precursors of the principal ruins.

The continuation of survey work and targeted excavations could make it possible to better understand the geophysical and historical context of these constructions and provide dateable evidence in order to establish whether or not there is a possible connection with the principal ruins.

Associations with the gold trade

Lobi country is at the centre of a series of gold bearing seams which were exploited from the 15th and 16th centuries. Gold mines are known along the length of River Mouhoun (formerly known as the Black Volta River) from those of Ashanti in the south of Ghana, through the Baoulé country in the south-west of Côte d'Ivoire to Poura in the north of Lobi country.

It is however extremely probable that this exploitation could go back to an earlier period since the populations of Nabé, Lorhon and Koulango who exploited gold in the area had previously worked in the area of Kong (to the south-west of Loropéni in northern Ivory Coast) in the 10th and 11th centuries.

The Lorhon were goldsmiths who transformed the gold into jewellery. The Lorhon seemed to have moved into the area after the fall of the Songhai Empire (whose capital was Gao), and the exhaustion of earlier gold mines in other areas.

History and development

The recent inter-disciplinary project has allowed a reassessment of the history of Loropéni. This has pushed much further back the date of its construction from around the 17th century to at least the 11th century AD and disassociated it from the Gan people, mentioned in the previous evaluation report.

Indeed in spite of the many writings on these ruins since the beginning of the 20th century, no serious archaeological investigations have been undertaken to support information from oral traditions and the other documentary sources. The recent targeted excavations were to thus able to start to bridge this gap.

It is necessary to locate the construction of the Loropéni ruins in the geopolitical context of the sub-Saharan kingdoms. They appeared after the fall of the first empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, when there were migrations of gold miners and goldsmiths into the Lobi area, and well before the development to the south of the Akan kingdoms, such as the powerful Ashanti kingdom, which caused migrations to the north as people fled slave hunters. Around Lobi country are the remains of many gold mines such as Werimitangna, close to Loropéni.

The gold bearing region was connected by caravans to the large commercial cities to the north on the river Niger, such as Djénné, Mopti and Timbuktu and from there across the

Sahara to north Africa., It was probably later that the gold was traded south to the Atlantic coast. Lobi country is crossed by the north-south Mopti - Sore-Dioulasso – Kong route, and the east-southwest route from Ouagadougou, through Boromo, Diébougou, Gaoua, to Bondoukou.

The ruins have long been associated with the gold trade but the evidence for this is circumstantial. It is suggested that such large and fortified structures need to be associated with defending a high value product and the need to house labour. The southern enclosure could have been used for slaves or miners at the gold mines. However no direct evidence for gold or for the use of the southern enclosure was forthcoming from the recent excavations.

Most oral traditions collected since the “discovery” of the ruins in 1902 indicate the Koulango people as builders of fortresses in the area, as well as in Burkina Faso in Ivory Coast. However, the most recent research shows that the Koulango were preceded by Lorhon and Nabé peoples who migrated south into the area and were known to be in the area of Kong, from the 10th century.

The Gan, who have been attributed as being the builders of the ruins, simply re-used them from the end of the 17th century when they left the territory of current Ghana to escape oppression from the Ashanti. At around the same time the focus of gold production moved south to the Ashanti area and the gold trade declined around the Lobi area. With its decline the fortified buildings were abandoned to be re-colonised by the Gan.

This is contrary to the work of Madeleine Père, recently published posthumously, who maintained that the Loropéni settlement would have been built by Tokpā Farma, ninth king of the dynasty of Gan, towards the end of his life with the aim of transferring the capital to it from Obiré. This project apparently did not meet with the approval of the ancestors and he died three years later. This explains the name ‘Kpôkayâga’, the house of the refusal, by which the site is known. In the previous report it was stated that not all local historians and archaeologists accept the attributions of the ruins to the Gan. It was suggested that archaeological excavations could provide evidence to help understand the genesis of the ruins and this indeed has been the case.

Certain versions of oral tradition record that the quadrangular ramparts were initially built, then the interior partitions and finally the buildings. Observation of the junction between the walls corroborates this assertion.

Recent studies and excavations have revealed evidence for use over a long duration and with possible discontinuities, or even periods of abandonment. Certain zones present several coats of plaster (up to five perfectly distinct layers), and the mortar in the external walls shows clearly several repairs. The higher levels from the excavation show a poverty of finds suggesting that the places could have been looted. Loropéni seems to have fallen out of use in the early to mid 19th century and before colonial times. The trees growing out of the ruins confirm this timescale.

The recent research has provided some enlightenment, but more work is needed. The conclusion of the archaeological report is that it is necessary to set up a research programme

of a few years duration to elucidate better the function, use and historical context of the ruins.

The Ruins of Loropéni values

The values of the property are related to the way they represent the distinctive fortified structures of the area and their presumed association with the trans-Saharan gold trade.

3. OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE, INTEGRITY AND AUTHENTICITY

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

Although the precise history of Loropéni ruins is only recently coming into focus through the recent research programme, and their functions still remains in part speculative, the integrity of the monument in terms of its status as the largest and best preserved fortified settlement is satisfactory.

In time as more evidence emerges, it may be necessary to consider whether a larger area could encompass more of the attributes that are linked to its use, function and history.

Without knowing the precise history or function of the ruins, it is not possible to say whether sufficient has been preserved to demonstrate how the totality of the original structures were used. Nor is it possible to say whether the fortified enclosure on its own without structures in its hinterland demonstrates adequately its use and function.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the stone walls as ruins is not in doubt.

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met.

Comparative analysis

Many large towns, such as Kano and Zaria in what is now Nigeria, had impressive walls but these were largely built of mud bricks, albeit sometimes on a stone foundation. To the south of Loropéni, the Notse kingdom in what is now northern Togo was said to be a collection of walled settlements under one ruler. Elsewhere in West Africa, the slave trade produced the need for forts for housing columns of slaves as they travelled to the coast. Some fortified enclosures have been associated with this activity.

Within West Africa, fortifications around towns and villages became widespread in the 19th century, reflecting the insecurity that pervaded much of the continent south of the Sahara at that time. Many were built of vegetable materials and few of these fortifications have survived in anything like their original form. Loropéni and the cluster of ruins in Lobi country are unusual in being built of stone; Loropéni in particular stands out in having such a large percentage of its walls surviving to almost full height. Some of the hundred or so ruins in Lobi country or

rectangular in form, others are circular. It is not clear how these two groups relate to each other.

Taking Africa as a whole, the best known walled site is Great Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe, whose stone remains were inscribed on the World Heritage list in 1986. Great Zimbabwe together with its successor Khami, also inscribed in 1986, and its precursor Mapungubwe, inscribed in 2003, are valued not just as fortifications but also for what they reflect in terms of the social organisations of large city states.

In terms of nominating Loropéni as the most outstanding example of the complex of stone ruins in the area, many of the extant remains have been surveyed by Henri Labouret (1920), George Savonnet (1986) and Paul Raymaekers (1996) and typologies have been drawn up which take account of the forms, dimensions, materials and techniques. However it is estimated that as many as 200 enclosures might have survived in Burkina Faso and across the border in Ivory Coast. It is also acknowledged that an inventory of these ruins is far from complete. Nevertheless they do appear to reflect a very specific sub-regional culture of which the enclosure of Loropéni is one of the largest quadrangular enclosures and considered to be the best preserved.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage list.

Justification of the Outstanding Universal Value

In the original nomination, the justification put forward by the State Party indicated that the Ruins of Loropéni were seen as an important witness of the development of kingdoms in the area of Lobi during 17th and 18th centuries. They are associated with ‘the exploitation of gold in the area and with its trade between the coast and the Sahel and across the Sahara Desert to North Africa. The imposing ruins testify to the strong climate of insecurity which reigned in the area at that time. The Ruins of Loropéni are also proof of the endogenous capacity of African people to develop elaborate technical solutions and to set up complex organizational structures. Difficulty in interpreting oral traditions for the Ruins of Lobi in general and of those of Loropéni in particular, mean that the mystery of the Ruins of Loropéni persists’.

As a result of the recent programme of investigation the justification has been updated.

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- The Ruins of Loropéni, dating from the 11th century, reflect the development and exploitation of gold in West Africa in connection with the increasingly flourishing trade between the large cities of the Sahel (Sore-Dioulasso) and the loop of Niger (Djénné, Mopti, Timbuktu) and, beyond, towards North Africa.

- The construction of the fortress dates back to well before the arrival of Europeans in Africa. This place is essential and irrefutable proof of the capacity of African people and specifically the Nabé, Lorhon, Koulango, and Touna, to use the materials available in their environment, in a judicious way to develop elaborate technical solutions to meet particular needs.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of criteria (ii) and (iv).

In the previous evaluation ICOMOS considered that without further knowledge it was not possible to say with certainty how the ruins relate to the formation of kingdoms in the area or their relationships with the gold or slave trade and thus the justification for the criteria could not be properly assessed. The recent research programme has allowed a fuller justification for the criteria to be suggested.

Criterion (ii): exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design.

The State Party justifies this criterion on the basis that The Ruins of Loropéni testify to the strong development of the gold trade and the paramount importance of gold extraction from the 11th century. Trade route connected the gold bearing zones to the large commercial cities of the loop of Niger and to North Africa. The insecurity and covetousness generated by this trade led to the development of strengthened and increasingly imposing human settlements.

ICOMOS considers that although what has been suggested can be supported this does not justify this criterion which needs to show how the property reflects an interchange of ideas over a wide area. In the current state of knowledge, although the gold extraction led to diffusion of ideas, it is not clear how this related to structures.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

Criterion (iii): bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.

This criterion was not suggested by the State Party. However ICOMOS considers that Loropéni can be seen as the best preserved example of a phenomenon of fortified settlements in a wide part of West Africa, linked to the tradition of gold mining, which seems to have persisted through at least seven centuries. Loropéni, given its size and scope reflects a type of structure quite different from the walled towns of what is now Nigeria, or the cities of the upper reaches of the river Niger which flourished as part of the empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai. It thus can be seen as an exceptional testimony to the settlement response generated by the gold trade.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

Criterion (iv): be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.

The State Party justifies this criterion on the basis that The Ruins of Loropéni are the most imposing and best preserved vestige of the impressive typology of the fortresses which have been identified in the area, created by the Nabé, Lorhon, Koulango, and Touna peoples from the 11th century onwards. These fortresses, making the best use of the possibilities offered by local building materials, enabled the organisation, extraction and transformation of gold in a safe context.

ICOMOS considers that the current research pushing the date of the fortress back much further back than previously suspected makes the Loropéni fortress contemporary with the early states of Ghana and Mali and with the foundations of the early cities of what is now Nigeria, such as Kano and Katsina. What has not been demonstrated however is how Loropéni can be linked to a significant stage in human history.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criterion (iii) and that the Outstanding Universal Value has been demonstrated.

4. FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROPERTY

Development pressures

There are currently no development pressures.

Tourism pressures

Visitor numbers are currently very low, but showing a marked increase in 2008 in response to an awakening of national interest. Two guides are on the site provide a protective presence.

Environmental pressures

The risks to the ruins are from trees and vegetation. Although some trees have been cleared from the site, others remain as their removal would mean conservation of the surrounding walls. The process of tree clearing needs to be done on a regular basis to keep vegetation to a small size.

The extremes of climate between the dry and wet season put pressure on the wall structures over time making the mortar friable and the walls more prone to collapse. As the structures get older more small regular maintenance and repair will be needed to keep the ruins in a stable state.

A programme of preventative conservation which includes training technicians and craftsmen is planned for 2009-2010.

Natural disasters

The greatest natural disaster risks are from fires and flooding.

Impact of climate change

A dramatic increase in rainfall, or an increase in intensity at certain times of year, could impact adversely on the structure of the walls, either from the rain or from increased flooding.

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are lack of regular maintenance and preventative conservation, both of which are now being addressed.

5. PROTECTION, CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

The boundary of the nominated property encompasses the walled enclosure and the buffer zone provides protection for the immediate hinterland. Both boundaries are satisfactory. Depending on the outcome of further investigations of the setting of the monument, it might be desirable in the future to consider enlarging the nominated property.

Ownership

The ruins and the buffer zone are owned by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Communication.

Protection

Legal Protection

In September 2002 a decree was issued to include the Ruins of Loropéni as part of the National list of Cultural Inheritance under an Ordinance for the Protection of the Cultural Inheritance, 1985. This was signed and came into force in 2005.

Since the first nomination, two decrees, N°2008-430 of 11 July 2008 and N°2009-010 of 22 January 2009, put in place a framework to create:

- A conservation base for the Ruins of Loropéni;
- A Committee of Protection and Management for the Ruins of Loropéni,
- A Scientific Council for the study, conservation and development of the Ruins of Loropéni.

A further decree N°2008-075 of December 29, 2008, created the post of conservator for the site of the Ruins of Loropéni, in charge of the management of the site as well as its conservation in connection with the Committee of Protection and Management.

Traditional Protection

The Chiefs of the local villages are charged to deal with contraventions against the ruins in terms of prohibited actions. Because of its association with the disease of king Tokpa Farma, the property benefits from a certain level of sacrality.

Effectiveness of protection measures

The legal and traditional protection together are adequate.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection is adequate.

Conservation

Inventories, recording, research

The first stage in recording the ruins has been undertaken and a scientific committee has been set up to further this work (see below).

Present state of conservation

Approximately 80% of these original ramparts are still present and reaching sometimes more than six meters in height. A large majority of the structures located inside the main walls have collapsed, and are sometimes present only in the form of traces at ground level.

There has been no active conservation of the site, apart from the clearance of some trees near the stone walls. In spite of nominal intervention at the ruins the state of conservation is fair but could quickly reach a critical stage if no remedial work is done to replace fallen stones, stop water ingress, remove invasive vegetation and stop burrowing animals.

Once started, deterioration on stone structures such as these, unprotected from the elements, can accelerate quickly.

Active Conservation measures

The last evaluation report noted that it was necessary to activate a conservation and preventative conservation programme for the ruins as soon as possible and this was requested by the Committee.

A programme has been drawn up by CraTerre to stabilise the walls with a preliminary programme of studies to identify the best approaches, an initial emergency programme for urgent actions and a longer term programme that involves capacity building of a conservation team.

The projects will be carried out by NGO CraTerre under the direct control of the Directorate-General of Cultural Inheritance.

The project is due to start in March 2009 and last two years. The total cost is \$207,148 and this will be met by contributions from the World Monuments fund (\$55K), African World Heritage Fund (\$17.8K), the Embassy of the Netherlands (\$40K) with the government (\$64K).

Maintenance

The programme will include training technicians and craftsmen to undertake regular maintenance work.

Effectiveness of conservation measures

The short and longer term actions in the CraTerre programme, for which finance is now in place, will provide effective, on-going, preventative as well as active conservation measures.

ICOMOS considers that the conservation programme recently initiated is a sound basis for stabilising and conserving the ruins.
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Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

The site falls under the responsibility of the Directorate for Cultural Heritage (DPC) and more particularly of the department for Sites, Monuments and Traditional Architecture.

The local management committee consists of local representatives of the Department together with local staff and representatives of the community. It is responsible for on-going issues, such as use of funds, the appropriate use of the Buffer Zone and general protection of the site. This committee ensures the participation and support of the local community. Its members have an important role in controlling the economic activities authorized inside the buffer zone.

The scientific committee is charged with examining, conceiving and supervising archaeological conservation and research. This committee is made up of a representative of the DPC, which assumes the direction of this committee, and of the Department of Archaeology of the University of Ouagadougou, the Ministry of Tourism, the Department of the Environment, and the Committee of protection and management.

This scientific committee has the role of improving knowledge on the site and of ensuring its conservation and development for the benefit of present and future generations.

Both committees were formally set up under the decree N°2008-075 of December 29, 2008. This also made provision for the post of conservator. He will draw up regular reports/ratios on the state of conservation of the site, put in place arrangements for visits and manage funds in dialogue with the Committee of Protection and Management.

The management of the site is supported by the local plan for the Commune of Loropéni and also by certain voluntary associations, such as Association for the Conservation and the Valorisation of Sites (ACVS), which ‘contribute to the conservation and the valorisation of the sites in general and those of the ruins of the department of Loropéni in particular’, and the French Association of the Volunteers of Progress (AFVP), which was involved with creating lodgings for tourists.

The realization of a fence delimiting the buffer zone in the form of a quickset hedge, proposed in the management plan, was the work of Association for the Development of Loropéni (ADL).

Policy framework: management plans and arrangements, including visitor management and presentation

A detailed Management Plan has been prepared. This sets out a good visitor reception plan for the site which sees the ruins as playing a prominent role in local development through visitors and the promotion of the site. The key objectives of the plan cover protection, preventative conservation, maintenance, management, threats, promotion and archaeological investigation, as well as sustainable use of the buffer zone. The plan includes a 5-year Action Plan which has started to be implemented. So far the following progress has been made:

- quickset hedge planted to delimit the perimeter of the buffer zone;
- completion of first excavations in 2008, with mainly national financing, supplemented by contributions of the World Heritage Centre and the Norwegian Government;
- Drawing up a plan for the continuation of excavations;
- Drawing up a programme of preventive conservation – see below;
- Plan to improve the reception of the visitors to be financed mainly by the Government;
- Appointment of conservator.

It is envisaged that the management plan will be evaluated during 2010 and a revised plan prepared for the period 2011-2015.

Risk preparedness

Arrangements proposed for the buffer zone, keeping an area outside the walls clear, should provide a fire break around the ruins. Clearly sustainable management of the vegetation in the buffer zone is also needed as a prime way of preventing fires. This is envisaged in the management plan.

It is understood that water washes off a nearby road near one corner of the structures. This however has been identified and will be addressed.

Involvement of the local communities

The two local villages, through their chiefs, are involved in guardianship of the monument. The management of the property envisages improvements for the villagers through the provision of a water pump.

Resources, including staffing levels, expertise and training

The modest visitor income, from around 200 visitors a year, is distributed between the local tourist office, the tourist guides, the Commune of Loropéni and the Board of Management.

If the site is inscribed, the Ministry for Culture, Arts and Tourism will be able to assign an annual budget to the department of Sites, Monuments and Traditional Architecture for a minimum of two missions and for taking part in meetings of the Local Committee. The Directorate of Cultural Heritage will also be given an objective to assemble aid and sponsorship in order to launch as soon as possible the programmes suggested in the management plan for stabilisation of the ruins and the first stages of archaeological research.

Professional staffs are employed in the Directorate of Cultural Heritage, although it is said that these are at a minimum level. Training in conservation and management is on-going through initiatives such as Africa 2009 programmes. The Directorate also has close links with the department of archaeology of the University of Ouagadougou.

Effectiveness of current management

The management arrangements in force which combines protection of the ruins, with further training, research and exploration and controlled economic activity in the surrounding area is appropriate for the property.

ICOMOS considers that the management arrangements are adequate.

6. MONITORING

Two guides from the office of Burkinabé Tourism, ensure a presence and a quasi-permanent monitoring of the site. A series of indicators has been developed for the ruins and the buffer zone, related to the effectiveness of maintenance, conservation and preventing harmful activities. These are linked to timescales and responsible authorities. It would clearly be desirable of this monitoring could be linked to regular photographic evidence.

ICOMOS considers that the monitoring regime is adequate.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The Ruins of Loropéni are dramatic and memorable structures. They are not unique, reflecting a large group of fortified enclosures in the Lobi area. They are however some of the largest and best preserved. At the time of the first evaluation it was said that ‘tantalisingly little is known about their history and origins. Although this adds to the sense of mystery, it does not help to allow assessment of their full significances. More needs to be determined about their use and relationship to people, kingdoms and trade, both south to the coast and north across the Sahara.

... A programme of research needs to be initiated (...) to establish the role of Loropéni and its associated fortified settlements in the wider West African social and economic context.'

Such a programme has been started and the results have pushed back knowledge of Loropéni to the 11th century to 17th century thus establishing it as part of the network of settlements that developed at that time based on the trans-Saharan gold trade. The economic centre of these trade were the kingdoms of the upper reaches of the river Niger, Ghana, then Mali then Songhai, with their cities of Timbuktu, Djénné, Mopti. At the same time walled cities were developed over a wide area as staging posts for the trade, such as Kano in what is now Nigeria. Loropéni is different from all of these in first not being a city but a smaller fortified settlement and secondly being constructed within a gold mining area. Although definitive links between Loropéni have not been established, the early date for the structure and the associated evidence produce a firm case for seeing the site as part of this extraordinary, far-reaching and extremely lucrative gold trade that fostered routes across half a continent and ultimately contributed to the development of empires far outside its borders.

The second concern of the first evaluation was the need for a programme of stabilisation of the walls. Such a programme has been formulated and funds are in place for it to commence in March 2009.

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that The Ruins of Loropéni, Burkino Faso, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of ***criterion (iii)***.

Proposed Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

The dramatic and memorable Ruins of Loropéni consist of imposing, tall, laterite stone perimeter walls, up to six metres in height, surrounding a large abandoned settlement. As the best preserved of ten similar fortresses in the Lobi area, part of a larger group of around a hundred stone-built enclosures, they are part of a network of settlements that flourished at the same time as the trans-Saharan gold trade and appear to reflect the power and influence of that trade and its links with the Atlantic coast. Recent excavations have provided radio-carbon dates suggesting the walled enclosure at Loropéni dates back at least to the 11th century AD and flourished between the 14th and 17th centuries, thus establishing it as an important part of a network of settlements

Criterion (iii): Loropéni is the best preserved example of a type of fortified settlements in a wide part of West Africa, linked to the tradition of gold mining, which seems to have persisted through at least seven centuries. Loropéni, given its size and scope reflects a type of structure quite different from the walled towns of what is now Nigeria, or the cities of the upper reaches of the river Niger which flourished as part of the empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai. It thus can be seen as an exceptional testimony to the settlement response generated by the gold trade.

The authenticity of the fortified settlements as ruins is not in doubt.

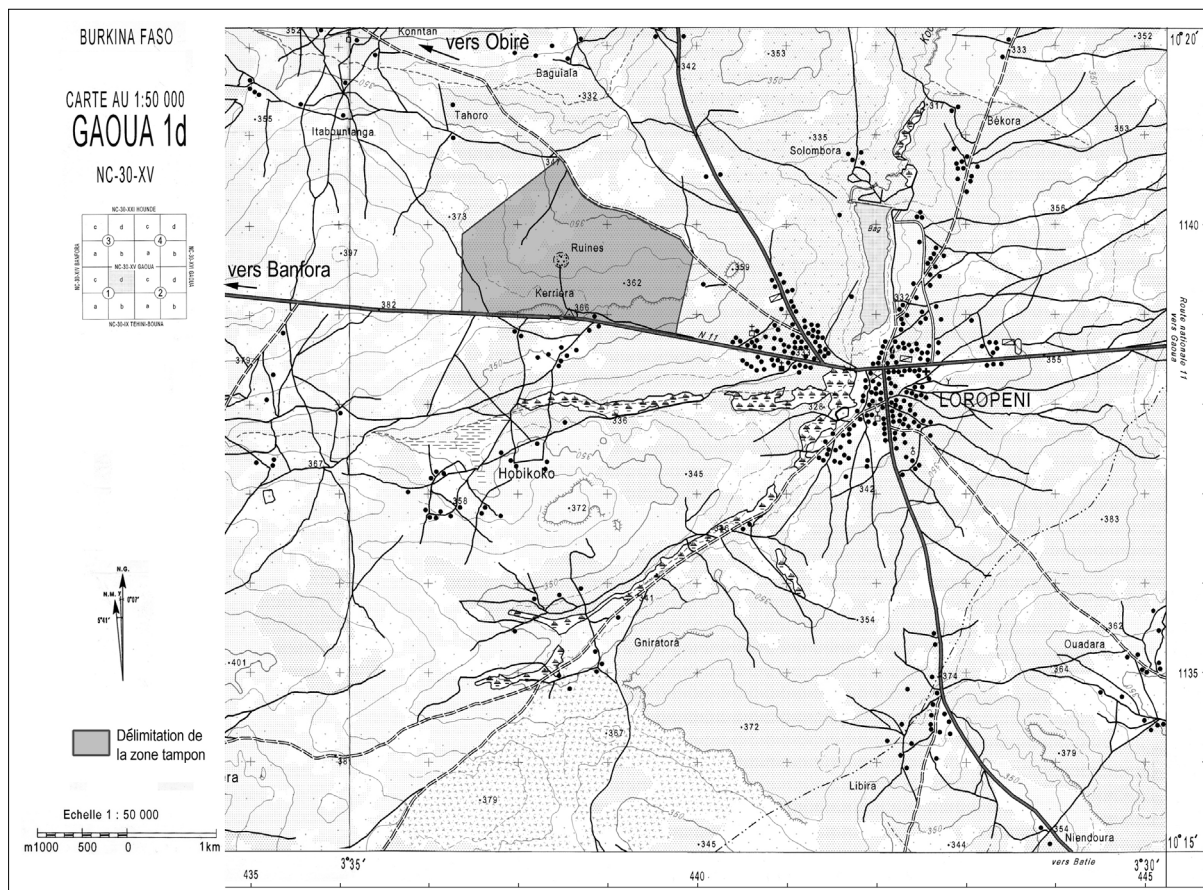
Although the precise history of Loropéni is only recently coming into focus through the recent research programme, and its function still remains in part speculative, the integrity of the monument in terms of its status as the largest and best preserved fortified settlement is satisfactory.

In time as more evidence emerges, it may be necessary to consider whether a larger area could encompass more of the attributes that are linked to its use, function and history.

The Committee of Protection and Management for the Ruins of Loropéni, the Scientific Council for the study, conservation and development of the Ruins of Loropéni and the Management Plan which has been implemented since 2005 form a good basis for management of the ruins as a focal point for sustainable development within the local community.

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party submit a report to the 35th session of the Committee in 2011 to provide a progress on the:

- Implementation of the stabilisation programme;
- Structuring and implementation of a medium term research programme





Aerial view



Map of the Ruins of Loropéni



Western rampart seen from the outside



View of the ramparts from the inside