

# 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° 362

## A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Old Town of Ghadames

Location : Al Hamadah Al Hamra

State Party : Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

Date : April 26, 1985

## B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion V.

## C) JUSTIFICATION

Ghadames, which Arab sources describe as "the pearl of the desert", is one of the oldest cities in the pre-Saharan region; it succeeded Antique Cydamae, a fortified city made an ally of Rome by Cornelius Balbus on his victorious expedition against the Garamantes in 19 B.C.

Today it is a small city (7,000 inhabitants in 1980) located in an oasis situated next to a palm grove. None of the surviving buildings date from the protohistoric Berber period, or the period of Roman domination, yet a remarkable domestic architectural style distinguishes Ghadames as a unique site among a series of pre-Saharan cities and settlements stretching along the northern edge of the desert from Libya to Mauritania.

Roughly circular in layout, the historic city of Ghadames is comprised of a cluster of houses. The reinforced outer walls of the houses on the edge of the city form fortified wall. However, this rudimentary urban enclosure also incorporates, here and there, doors and bastions.

The basic unit of the city is its houses which comprise a minimum of two main floors. Access to the ground floor, which may be sunken, is by a single entrance door which opens on a narrow hallway leading to a rectangular-shaped room where provisions are stored, and, in the back, to a staircase. The staircase leads to a much more spacious upper level. Ground level living space encroaches upon the blind enclosed passageways along the walls on the ground floor which open on the city forming arcades rather than actual streets. The first floor generally includes a raised attic and bedrooms, and sometimes a sitting-room; there may also be a second floor with a similar layout. At the level of the terraces -there may be three or four

depending on the house- only the projecting portion formed by the raised attic rises above the roof marked off by low enclosure walls.

The contradicting layout of this unusual city cannot be perceived as a whole. At ground level, the narrow, dark arcades cut off the main parts of the buildings, permitting virtually underground circulation; small, isolated family units are the salient feature of the upper floors. A kind of collective dimension is provided by the terraces, which form an open cityscape. However they do so by separating the sexes: the terrace is the domain of women, and gives them a great deal of freedom. Communicating between terraces, they make friends with neighbors and can even move about the city's "roof". The covered arcades at the ground level are generally reserved for the men.

Ghadames has conserved the original materials specific to this surprising urban structure: pisé or clay brick walls, woodwork, masonry and palm wood casings. Liming of the walls inside and on large outdoor areas brightens the rooms and highlights the spartan decorations, windows and gypsum niches, paintings, objects incrustated in walls, etc.

At the meeting on the harmonization of tentative lists of Greater Maghreb countries held in Paris on November 6-7, 1985, the participants recognized the outstanding value of the traditional human settlement of Ghadames, which has no comparison with any other site in southern Tunisia, Algeria or Morocco, or any site in Mauritania.

ICOMOS gives a favorable opinion on the inclusion of Ghadames on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion V, as the site is an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement which is representative of a culture and which has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change. So that the inclusion is not honorific or inoperative, it should be accompanied by a management plan which provides for :

- the delimitation of a protective zone around the historic city which will clearly distinguish it from the modern city whose growth should be controlled;
- safeguarding of traditional techniques and know-how to ensure conservation of a fragile construction while respecting the traditional forms and materials used;
- management of the oasis, whose survival is necessary for an understanding of the history of the site and for the ecological equilibrium of the city. Special attention should be paid to traditional systems for the irrigation of the palm tree grove.

ICOMOS, April 1986.