

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° 416

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : The Puebla-Cholula Monument Areas

Location : State of Puebla

State Party : Mexico

Date : December 2, 1986

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the inclusion of the proposed cultural property on the World Heritage List be deferred.

C) JUSTIFICATION

Puebla and Cholula lie some 100 kms east of Mexico City, at the foot of Popocatepetl, one of the highest volcanoes in Mexico (5,452 m). The two cities, which have been jointly nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List, constitute the same type of colonial city/prehispanic city combination as Oaxaca and Monte Alban further to the south.

The two cities, which are about 12 kms apart, are very closely associated with the history of New Spain and Mexico. Cortès reached Cholula during the summer of 1519 and it was there that he ordered one of the bloodiest massacres of the entire conquest, with the number of victims among the population reaching between 3000 and 6000.

It was in Puebla on May 5, 1862, that General Zaragoza won the first significant victory over the French expeditionary corps. The city was subsequently renamed Puebla de Zaragoza in memory of this event of national importance.

The cultural heritage of Cholula and Puebla, which is of considerable interest, cannot be reduced to such simple definitions as an archaeological site or an historic centre. In Cholula the Spanish city was built on the ruins of the temples which were burnt during the massacre of 1519. Legend has it that the Spaniards, by building a church on the site of each temple, founded a total of 365 churches, one for each day of the year. This is clearly an exaggeration, but the church of San Gabriel, which the Franciscans began building in 1549, lies, in fact, on the very site of the Quetzalcoatl Sanctuary, and Nuestra Senora de los Remedios, which was built in the 18th century at the very top of the enormous acropolis-pyramid, with a base of 14,400 square meters, clearly illustrates an unbroken historical continuity stretching from

prehispanic times up to the present day.

In Puebla, the urban layout of the "Ciudad de los Angeles", founded ex nihilo in 1531, has been greatly extended into the Cuetzlaxcoapan valley. It is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish the original historic city from the highly industrialized (steel works, mechanical constructions, canning factories) conurbation of over 1 million inhabitants, and the balance between the new city and the old Indian city has been lost for good. Cholula now appears to be just a western suburb of Puebla and it is bound to merge with the state capital in the medium term, even if the two communities remain distinct.

While recognising the major interest that the ancient monumental heritage of Puebla represents -comprising great religious buildings such as the Cathedral, Santo Domingo, the Jesuit Church; superb palaces such as the old Archbishop's Palace (Palafox Library) and the University; as well as a host of houses whose walls are covered in gaily coloured tiles (azulejos)- ICOMOS would like to draw the Committee's attention to the vast transformations which took place in the 19th century as a result of the Reform Laws (1857), which brought about the closing of the big convents and a rapid change in urban landscape. Of the 2,619 historic buildings listed in 391 blocks, 1.1% date back to the 16th century, 23.4% to the 17th century, 18.2% to the 18th century, and 57.3% to the 19th century.

Although the archaeological value of the prehispanic monuments in Cholula is beyond question -even if the reconstruction of part of the Great Pyramid, Building F, is out of keeping due to the deliberate choice of contemporary materials- and the historical interest of Puebla is undeniable, ICOMOS regrets that the project for the inclusion of these two sites on the World Heritage List appears to be less convincing than the project submitted in the same year concerning the Monte Alban-Oaxaca group with which comparisons are inevitable.

Because urban development has so seriously modified relations between the two cities in the Cuetzlaxcoapan valley and indeed still continues to attenuate that opposition which was so strongly expressed in 1531, it would undoubtedly be more appropriate, for a cultural site in full transformation, for a new approach to be adopted, based on a study of colonial architecture in Latin America and recent developments concerning it undertaken by ICOMOS within the framework of the Convention.

ICOMOS, April 1987

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WORLD HERITAGE LIST N° 416

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : The Puebla-Cholula Monument Areas

Location : State of Puebla

State Party : Mexico

Date : December 2, 1986

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the centre of Puebla be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria II and IV and that the inscription of Cholula be deferred.

C) JUSTIFICATION

Puebla and Cholula lie some 100 kms east of Mexico City, at the foot of Popocatepetl, one of the highest volcanoes in Mexico (5,452 m). The two cities, which have been jointly nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List, constitute the same type of colonial city/prehispanic city combination as Oaxaca and Monte Alban further to the south.

The two cities, which are about 12 kms apart, are very closely associated with the history of New Spain and Mexico. Cortès reached Cholula during the summer of 1519 and it was there that he ordered one of the bloodiest massacres of the entire conquest, with the number of victims among the population reaching between 3000 and 6000.

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The cultural heritage of Cholula and Puebla, which is of considerable interest, cannot be reduced to such simple definitions as an archaeological site or an historic centre. In Cholula the Spanish city was built on the ruins of the temples which were burnt during the massacre of 1519. Legend has it that the Spaniards, by building a church on the site of each temple, founded a total of 365 churches, one for each day of the year. This is clearly an exaggeration, but the church of San Gabriel, which the Franciscans began building in 1549, lies, in fact, on the very site of the Quetzalcoatl Sanctuary, and Nuestra Senora de los Remedios, which was built in the 18th century at the very top of the enormous acropolis-pyramid, with a base of 14,400 square meters, clearly

illustrates an unbroken historical continuity stretching from prehispanic times up to the present day.

In Puebla, the urban layout of the "Ciudad de los Angeles", founded ex nihilo in 1531, has been greatly extended into the Cuetzlaxcoapan valley. It is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish the original historic city from the highly industrialized (steel works, mechanical constructions, canning factories) conurbation of over 1 million inhabitants, and the balance between the new city and the old Indian city has been lost for good. Cholula now appears to be just a western suburb of Puebla and it is bound to merge with the state capital in the medium term, even if the two communities remain distinct.

ICOMOS recommends the inclusion of the historic centre of Puebla on the World Heritage List essentially on the basis of criterion IV. In an untouched urban network this historic centre comprises major religious buildings such as the Cathedral, Santo Domingo, the Jesuit Church, as well as superb palaces such as the old Archbishop's Palace (Palafox Library) and the University and a host of houses whose walls are covered in gaily coloured tiles (azulejos). Although 19th century transformations resulting from the Reform Laws (1857) modified the urban landscape through the closing of many convents, they permitted Puebla's endowment with quality public and private architecture. Official buildings, town houses and residential ensembles of the 19th represent 57.3% of the 2,619 historic buildings listed in 391 blocks. The buildings from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries represent respectively 1.1%, 23.4% and 18.2%.

As the influence of Puebla was equal to the architectural quality of this new city, criterion II may also be cited from the 16th century onwards.

Although aware of the archaeological value of the monuments in Cholula, ICOMOS considers that the reconstruction of part of the Great Pyramid, Building F, with contemporary materials is contrary to principles stated in the Venice Charter. Because urban development has so seriously modified relations between the two cities in the Cuetzlaxcoapan valley, the project of a joint inscription of Puebla and Cholula on the World Heritage List can no longer be justified by the complementary characteristics of the two sites.

ICOMOS, October 1987