

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° 444

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Ksar of Aït Ben Haddou

Location : Province of Ouarzazate

State Party : Morocco

Date : December 31, 1986

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

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

C) JUSTIFICATION

The earthen constructions of southern Morocco are rightly celebrated, for they represent a particular family of pre-Saharan architecture, which is common to all countries of the Great Maghreb, Mauritania and Libya. It is not certain that the introduction of these striking constructions dates back to Islamization and to the foundation of Sijilmassa in 757, but it is probable (though the oldest testimonies do not appear to be from before the 17th century) that their structure and technique were propagated from a very early time in Djebel and in the valleys of the south.

The typology of this traditional habitat is extremely diversified. Large houses, called Tighremt in Beber and Dâr or Kasba in Arabic, bring together around a central rectangular courtyard, four tall fortified wings, topped by angle towers. In some cases they allow entrance to lower connected houses situated around a second courtyard which has an enceinte.

The Kasba of southern Morocco is the family unit of the wealthy classes and has varied forms and multiple functions. For the most part, they are country houses; the ground floor is used for agricultural purposes and the upper floors serve as living quarters in winter (the upper portion) and in summer (the lower portion). Adjoining houses are reserved for agricultural workers, as in the Skura Oasis. But the Kasba can also be a veritable palace-fortress, the seat of local power, as in the ancient region of Glaoua, in Taurirt and in Teluet. It then takes on the dimensions of a small village.

In contrast to the Kasba, the family unit, is the Ksar (plural Ksour), which is mainly a collective grouping. Inside the defensive

walls, which are reinforced by angle towers each with a zig-zag-shaped gate, houses crowd together. Some are modest, others resemble small urban castles with their high angle towers whose upper portion presents decorative motifs in clay brick. But there are also buildings and community areas: collective sheep pens and stables, lofts and silos, market place, meeting room for the jmaa (assembly of family chiefs), mosque, madrasas, etc.

Aït Ben Haddou, located 31 km from Ouarzazate, is the most famous ksar in the Ounila Valley and, along with all the valleys of the oasis, it has been globally protected since 1953.

It is an extraordinary ensemble of buildings offering a complete panorama of pre-Saharan construction techniques (ramming mass worked into panel brick and bullheader, ordinary moulded earth, clay brick, etc.) as well as a striking miniature of the architectural typology of southern Morocco. An astonishing loft-fortress overlooks the mountain against which lies the ksar; the lofts, called Agadir or Ighram, are not uncommon in Morocco, but their defensive character is not always as evident as in the present case by the choice of a site on high and a fortification system linking the loft with the village, conceived as the last bastion of resistance in the event of a siege.

ICOMOS, who has closely followed the efforts of the Moroccan government to compile an inventory, protect and rehabilitate the earthen architecture of the pre-Saharan zone, considers that the ksar of Aït Ben Haddou, which still has many constructions in rather good condition, might serve as a testing ground for a conservation policy based on the return to traditional techniques of working earth and, secondarily, wood.

The ksar has every indication for being included on the World Heritage List, of course, because of the celebrity it enjoys among tourists following the realization of two great films, but especially because of the intrinsic qualities of the site, the organization of space and the architecture. ICOMOS suggests that the protection, which implies severe non aedificandi measures in the area surrounding the ksar of Aït Ben Haddou, should not be restricted to individual components, but should encompass the coherent, limited ensemble in the Ounila Valley.

ICOMOS, subject to an agreement by the Moroccan government with respect to these recommendations, puts forward an opinion in favor of the inclusion of Aït Ben Haddou on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria IV and V.

- Criterion IV. Aït Ben Haddou is an eminent example of a ksar in southern Morocco which illustrates the main types of constructions that may be observed in the valleys of Dra, Todgha, Dades and Sous.

- Criterion V. This traditional habitat, which is representative of a culture, has become vulnerable as a result of irreversible changes.

ICOMOS, May 1987