

**IDENTIFICATION**

- Nomination** : Pueblo of Taos
- Location** : State of New Mexico
- State Party** : United States of America
- Date** : 30 December 1987

**DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY**

The culture of the Pueblo Indians extended through a wide geographical area of northern Mexico and the southwest United States. It can still be found in a certain number of communities in the States of Chihuahua (Mexico) and Arizona and New Mexico (United States). Taos is the best preserved of the pueblos north of the borders defined by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848).

Located in the valley of a small tributary of the Rio Grande, Taos comprises a group of habitations and ceremonial centres (6 kivas have been conserved), which are representative of a culture largely derived from the traditions of the prehistoric Anasazi Indian tribes, who settled around the present borders of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado. Their culture went into an irreversible decline, and in the later 13th century major sites like Mesa Verde and Chaco (included on the World Heritage List in 1978 and 1987 respectively) were abandoned, perhaps because of major climatic changes.

The proliferation of small pueblos in the valley of the Rio Grande and its tributaries, when considered along with the disappearance of the Anasazi tribes, was one of the major characteristics of the settlement of the North American continent. Modest rural communities, characterized by common social and religious structures, traditional agricultural practices perfected during the "classical" period, and a systematic use of irrigation, were built. Taos is thought to have appeared before 1400.

In the modern historical period the two major characteristics of the Pueblo civilization were mutually contradictory : unchanging traditions deeply rooted in the culture and an ever-constant ability to absorb other cultures. Their faculty for acculturation gradually began to appear following the first Spanish expedition of the Governor of New Galicia, Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, in 1540-1542. Beginning in 1613, the inhabitants of Taos resisted the system of encomiendas which allowed certain Spaniards to exact a tribute in kind from the village. In 1634 the missionary Fray Alonso de Benavides complained to the Pope of their "rebellious" attitude.

The entire 18th century was a time of wars in which Taos played an important part in resisting the colonizers. However, the breeds of cattle and types of grain introduced by the conquerors were readily adopted into their agricultural system. Attempts to convert the Pueblos to Christianity were ill-received (during the major Pueblo revolt of 1680 the first church

was burned down) but unconsciously the religious mentality of the people changed. A similar dichotomy between an irredentist attitude in principle and an assimilation in fact marked the two subsequent historical stages : from 1821 to 1848, under Mexican administration, and from 1848 to the present, under the US administration. In 1970 the people of Taos obtained the restitution of lands usurped by the Government, which included the sacred site of the Blue Lake. At the same time, their ritual ceremonies include both a Christmas procession and the Hispano-Mexican dance of the Matachines.

Today, the village appears at first sight to conform with the description given in 1776 by Fray Francisco Atanasio Dominguez. However, although the earthen enclosure which he likened to one of the Biblical cities survives, numerous modifications can be observed.

To the west, the missionaries' convent and church lie in ruins. A new church was built at a different location of the west side of the north plaza in the 19th century. The multi-tiered adobe dwellings still retain their original form and outline, but details have changed. Doors, which traditionally were mostly used to interconnect rooms, are now common as exterior access to the ground floors and to the roof tops on upper stories. Windows, which traditionally were small and incorporated into walls very sparingly, are now common features. The proliferation of doors and windows through time at Taos reflects the acculturation of European traits and the relaxing of needs for defensive structures. In addition to ovens located outdoors, fireplaces have been built inside the living quarters.

### **AUTHENTICITY**

The two main adobe building complexes retain their traditional three-dimensional layout. Certain features, such as doors and windows, have been introduced over the last century, which may with some justification be claimed to represent a natural evolutionary process, as the community has adjusted to a changed social and economic climate. In recent years there has been a deliberate policy of ensuring that all repair and reconstruction work has been carried out using traditional materials and techniques and of ensuring that discordant elements, such as inappropriate doors, have been replaced using more harmonious designs and materials.

### **MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION**

Administration of Taos Pueblo is vested in the Taos tribe, which is deeply conscious of its heritage and of the material expression of that heritage in the buildings of the settlement. It has a comprehensive and well conceived Preservation Project, headed by a very competent Director, who is a member of the Taos tribe. Restoration work is carried out by his team, who are all members of the tribe, with scrupulous respect for traditional materials and techniques.

Although the self-governing Indian community maintains its identity in face of the city of Taos, which was founded after 1786 further downstream, two dangers threaten the medium-term future of this

traditional human settlement. First, the pueblo of Taos has tended to become a seasonal habitat reserved for ceremonial functions, with most of the population living permanently in what were formerly summer residences situated outside the enclosure, which have been provided with the modern facilities that are not permitted within the main pueblo. Secondly, the pueblo, which has a Visitor's Centre, is increasingly assuming the role of a tourist attraction.

## **EVALUATION**

### **Qualities**

A number of the Pueblo culture settlements established in the late 13th and early 14th centuries in the valleys of the Rio Grande and its tributaries have survived continuously up to the present day. Taos is exceptional among this group by virtue of the fact that it has retained its original layout and distinctive style of architecture virtually intact. As such it vividly illustrates the survival of a traditional way of life and community characteristic of this region of "Oasis America" over more than a thousand years.

## **COMMENTS**

This nomination was submitted in 1987 and deferred awaiting a study to compare it with other Pueblo sites, especially those in northern Mexico.

The Mexican Government nominated the Paquimé archaeological site as a complement to Taos. It was recommended by the World Heritage Bureau in June 1991 that the two sites should be included on a joint nomination. In a letter to Mrs Raidl of UNESCO dated 11 October 1991 the Mexican Permanent Delegate to UNESCO indicated that his Government was not prepared to follow this recommendation, on the grounds that the two sites, "although connected, displayed very different characteristics."

The argument put forward in this letter has some merit. The two sites differ in that one has continued in existence up to the present as a human settlement, whilst the other is an archaeological site, displaying the remains of a major Pueblo settlement that no longer survives. Other differences are also present in layout and detail.

It must be added, moreover, that archaeological sites of the Pueblo culture are already represented on the World Heritage List by Mesa Verde (N° 27) and Chaco (N° 353 rev), although these belong to the earlier classic phase. Any decision about the inclusion of Paquimé should be made in relation to these sites rather than Taos.

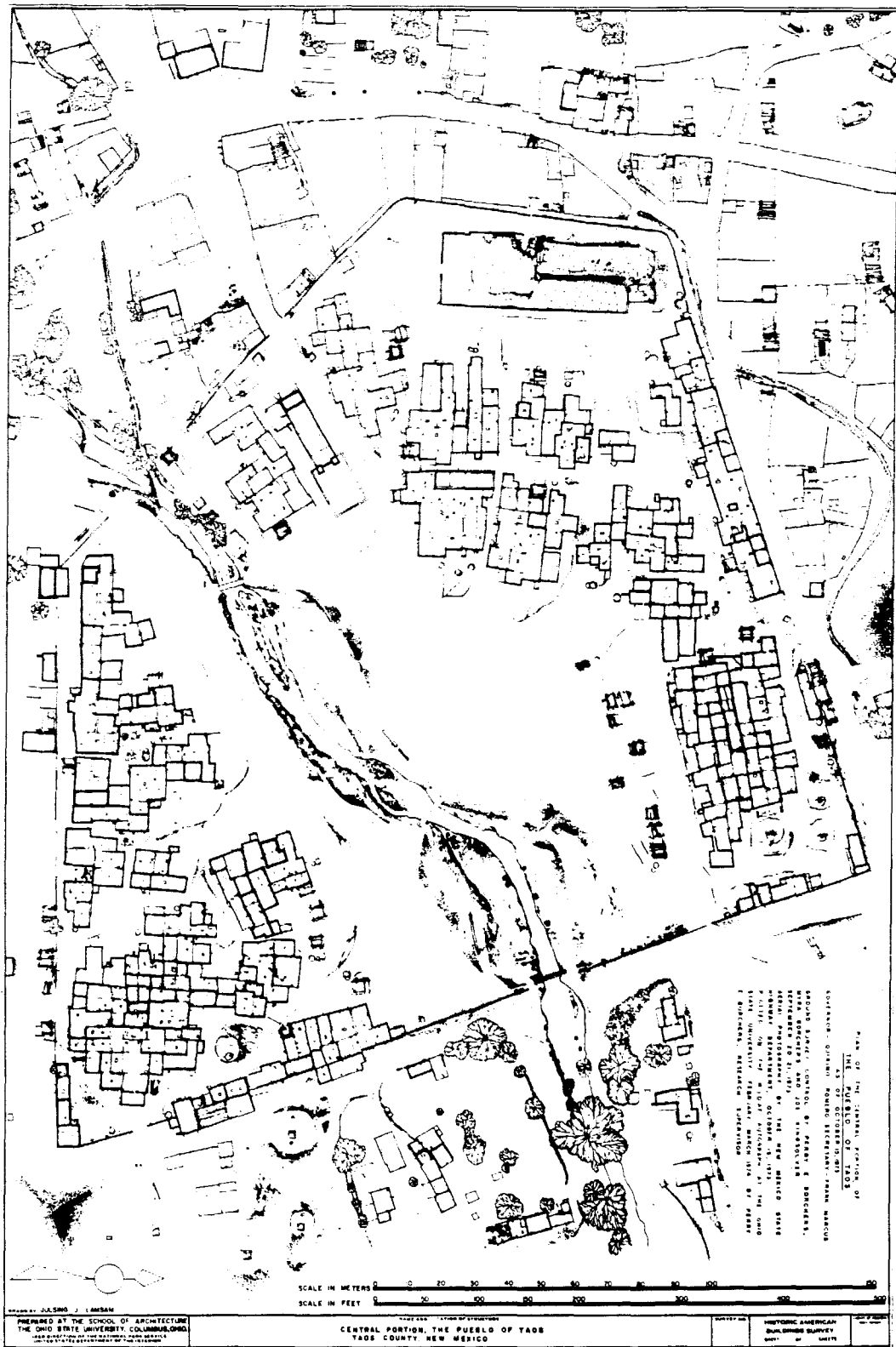
An ICOMOS mission composed of expert Mexican and US National Committee members, the Secretary General, and the World Heritage Coordinator visited sites in Mexico and New Mexico on 13-18 April 1992. The above recommendation is based on their report.

## **ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION**

That this cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of Criterion iv.

- **Criterion iv** : Taos is a remarkable example of a traditional type of architectural ensemble from the pre-Hispanic period of the Americas unique to this region which has successfully retained most of its traditional forms up to the present day. Thanks to the determination of the latter-day Native American community, it appears to be successfully resisting the pressures of modern society.

ICOMOS, October 1992



TAOS : plan du site / plan of the site