

Vigan (Philippines)

No 502rev

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Historic Town of Vigan
<i>Location</i>	Province of Ilocos Sur
<i>State Party</i>	Philippines
<i>Date</i>	30 April 1998

Justification by State Party

Vigan, part of the 18th and 19th century network of Asian trading cities, demonstrates a unique architecture that effortlessly fuses Ilocano, Filipino, Chinese, and Spanish styles. It also demonstrates, in a tropical Asian setting rather than in the New World, the typical Spanish colonial urban layout as specified by the *Ley de las Indias*, thus linking Vigan to another network of colonial cities in Latin America.

Criterion ii

Vigan is testimony to the Filipino cultural traditions and lifestyle of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. Its domestic architecture, allowing business to be conducted on the ground floor and the family to reside above, reflects deep kinship with its Asian neighbours, where entrepreneurs preferred to live and work in their houses. The lifestyle gave rise to streets lined with shop-houses, similar to the rows of Vigan houses that stand next to one another along the narrow streets. The urban ensemble of Vigan is a group of buildings which, because of its architecture, its homogeneity, and its place in and relationship with the landscape, is truly of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history and art.

Criterion iii

The architecture of Vigan is truly reflective of its roots. It is built from the wood, stone, shells (*kapis*), and terra cotta derived from its surroundings. The houses are in the traditional *bahay na bato* style, where the ground floor is enclosed by stone walls and the upper level is constructed entirely of wood. A variant to this style exists in Vigan in which both storeys of some houses are built entirely in stone or brick.

Criterion iv

Vigan is well known in the Philippines as the last urban area that has maintained the architecture and urban planning established during the Spanish colonial period. Modernization and progress are creating pressure for the transformation of many structures in the historic core zone as well as the buffer zone. However, Vigan is determined to maintain its authenticity.

Criterion v

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 *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

Before the arrival of the Spanish, there was a small indigenous settlement on what was at that time an island, consisting wooden or bamboo houses on stilts. In 1572 the *conquistador* Juan de Salcedo founded a new town, which he named Villa Ferdinandina, on this site, and made it his capital when he was appointed Lieutenant Governor (*Encomendero*) of the entire Ilocos region. Intended as a trading centre rather than a fortress, it was the northernmost city established in the Philippines by the Spanish.

At the end of the 17th century a new form of architecture evolved, which combined the traditional construction with the techniques of building in stone and wood introduced by the Spanish. Brick was introduced by the Augustinian friars for their churches and other buildings.

The seat of the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia was transferred there in 1758, making it the centre of religious activity in the region. In 1778, as a result of its expansion, it was renamed Ciudad Ferdinandina.

The Mestizo river was central to the development of the town in the 16th-19th centuries: large sea-going vessels could berth in the delta and small craft communicated with the interior. However, it is now no longer navigable owing to silting, as a result of which the town is no longer an island.

As the major commercial centre for the region, Vigan traded directly with China. As a stage in the Manila-Acapulco galleon trade that lasted throughout the Spanish colonial period, it supplied goods that were shipped across the Pacific to Mexico, and thence onwards across the Atlantic to Europe. These trading links resulted in constant exchanges of peoples and cultures between the Ilocanos, Filipinos, Chinese, Spanish, and (in the 20th century) North Americans.

Description

Vigan is located in the delta of the Abra river, off the coastal plain of the China Sea, close to the north-east tip of the island of Luzon.

The present-day municipality covers some 27km², divided into nine urban districts (*poblaciones*) and thirty rural villages (*barangays*). Nearly half the total area is still in use for agriculture. The Historic Core Zone, which is proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List, covers an area of 17.25ha defined on two sides by the Govantes and Mestizo rivers.

The traditional Spanish checkerboard street plan opens up into a main plaza, in two parts. The Plaza Salcedo is the longer arm of an L-shaped open space, with the Plaza Burgos as the shorter. The former is dominated by the Municipal Hall and the Provincial Capitol and the latter by the Cathedral.

The urban plan of the town closely conforms with the Renaissance grid plan specified in the *Ley de la Indias* for all

new towns in the Spanish Empire. There is, however, a noticeable difference between Vigan and contemporary Spanish colonial towns in Latin America in the Historic Core (known as the Mestizo district), where the Latin tradition is tempered by strong Chinese, Ilocano, and Filipino influences. As its name implies, this district was settled by affluent families of mixed Chinese-Ilocano origin.

The building materials used in Vigan are terra cotta, wood, shells (*kapis*), stone, and lime, all obtained from the surrounding area. The architecture of the typical Vigan house is derived from the traditional Filipino dwelling, the *bahay kubo*, which is a small one-room hut built of light woven materials (wood, bamboo, and thatch), raised off the ground on stilts for ventilation and as protection against monsoon flooding.

Such structures are no longer to be found in Vigan, but their influence is discernible in the much larger *bahay na bato* (stone house). This is a much more solid structure, with a stone-built lower storey surmounted by a timber-framed upper storey, and with a steeply pitched tiled roof (reminiscent of traditional Chinese architecture). The exterior walls of the upper storey are enclosed by window panels of *kapis* shells framed in wood which can be slid back for better ventilation. Most of the existing buildings were probably built in the mid 18th to late 19th centuries. Few have escaped internal reorganization to adapt them for alternative use with the decline of the town's prosperity.

The Chinese merchants and traders conducted their business from offices and warehouses on the ground floors of their houses, with the living quarters above. This is characteristic of Chinese society, to be observed in other Asian cities such as Penang, Singapore, and the older sections of Bangkok.

The resulting townscape has a special quality not to be found elsewhere. It is a unique manifestation of the multi-cultural nature of Filipino society, which harmoniously blends Ilocano, Filipino, Chinese, and North American elements to produce a homogeneous whole.

In addition to the domestic and commercial architecture, Vigan possesses a number of significant public buildings, which also show multi-cultural influences. These include the Cathedral of St Paul (1790-1800), the Archbishop's Palace (1783), St Paul's College (1892), the Catholic Cemetery Chapel (1852), and the neo-classical early 20th century Provincial Capitol.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Vigan is currently protected by the following legal instruments at national level:

- Presidential Decree No 374, 1974 "Amending certain sections of ... the Cultural Properties Preservation and Protection Act;
- Presidential Decree No 756, 1975 "Amending Presidential Decree No 260 to include the Mestizo Section, the houses of Padre José Burgos and Leona Florentino in its scope";
- Presidential Decree No 1505, 1978 "Amending Presidential Decree No 260, as amended, by prohibiting the unauthorized modification, alteration, repair, and

destruction of original features of all national shrines, monuments, landmarks, and other important edifices";

- Executive Order No 358, 1996 "Creating a Presidential Commission for the Restoration, Conservation and Preservation of Vigan Heritage Village."

A new "Act providing for the Protection and Preservation of Philippine Cultural Heritage ..." is shortly to come into effect.

At local level, the Ordinance No 05 "Providing for the preservation and protection of ancestral houses and other properties in Vigan, Ilocos Sur, particularly in the Mestizo Section" was promulgated in 1990 by the Municipality of Vigan. Following the 2nd International Conference on Vigan in March 1997, the following Municipal Ordinances were approved by the Sangguniang Bayan (Municipal Council):

- Ordinance No 12 "Defining the Core and Buffer Zones of the Historic Town of Vigan and the historical, educational, aesthetic, and economic parameters of its preservation and development";
- Ordinance No 14 "Providing the guidelines for the conservation of the Historic Town of Vigan."

The Council is still considering the proposed Ordinance "Creating the Conservation Authority of Vigan."

Management

Ownership of the buildings and open spaces included in the nomination is mixed. The public buildings are owned variously by the Provincial Government of Ilocos Sur, the Municipal Government of Vigan, and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Nueva Segovia, and most of these are accessible to the public. All the houses in the Core and Buffer Zones are privately owned, but none is open to the public.

The Core and Buffer Zones are carefully defined so as to preserve the urban fabric and townscape. This action was taken following the deferral of the nomination in 1987, when the zones were not adequately delineated.

Formal responsibility for the preservation of the Historic Core rests with the Vigan Heritage Commission, created by Executive Order No 358, 1996, in collaboration with the Municipality of Vigan. In addition, the Commission has links with the Department of Tourism, the National Historical Institute, the National Museum, the Intramuros Administration (Manila), the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, and the non-governmental organizations involved in the conservation of the town. Church property is administered through the Archdiocesan Commission for the Conservation of the Cultural Heritage of the Church.

Awaiting the establishment of the proposed specialist Conservation Authority, day-to-day management remains the province of the Municipality of Vigan.

A number of land-use and other plans take account of the special needs of Vigan to varying degrees. These include:

- National Tourist Master Plan for the Philippines 1991-2010;
- Conservation Plan for the Historical Center of Vigan, 1995 (Tourconsult/International for the Commission of the European Union);

- Tourism Development Master Plan for Region I, 1992; Vigan, 1995 (Department of Tourism);
- Northwestern Luzon Growth Quadrangle Development Plan, 1995 (USAid Project);
- Investment Promotion Package for the Northwestern Luzon Growth Quadrangle, 1997 (USAid Project);
- Implementing Rules and Regulations: Action Plan, 1996 (Vigan Heritage Commission).

The Second International Conference for the Conservation and Development of Vigan, held in 1997, prepared a number of draft policies and ordinances for the development and preservation of the historic town.

Negotiations are in progress at the present time with the Agencia Española de la Cooperación Internacional for the preparation of a "Comprehensive Conservation and Development Plan of Vigan."

All funding for conservation projects at the present time comes from the limited budget of the Municipality of Vigan. Local non-governmental organizations are studying mechanisms for fund-raising, and private donations have been received for specific projects. When it is fully operational the work of the Vigan Heritage Commission, which is mandated to coordinate conservation programmes in the town, will be funded by the national government.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The first attempt to sensitize proprietors of historic properties and administrators in Vigan to the need for adequate conservation was in 1975, when the National Museum organized a seminar at which the town's heritage and the need to preserve it were emphasized. Subsequently a team of architects and engineers was sent by the Museum to carry out documentation work and advise property owners on necessary conservation measures. However, shortage of funds meant that this had little lasting impact.

The 1995 Conservation Plan for the Historical Centre of Vigan (see above) surveyed the existing buildings (56 properties with wooden upper storeys, 130 entirely in masonry or brick), and concluded that 86 structures were in a good state of conservation and 84 in a mediocre to poor state of conservation.

A detailed inventory of 120 houses was carried out in 1996, funded by the Toyota Foundation, and this serves as the basis for future conservation planning.

Authenticity

The street pattern is entirely authentic, conforming completely with that laid down by the Spanish in the 16th century. The authenticity of the overall townscape and the open spaces is also high.

So far as the buildings are concerned, lack of conservation control has resulted in the use of modern materials such as galvanized iron on roofs instead of tiles.

An awareness of the need to preserve authenticity has only developed recently in relation to Vigan. Restoration and conservation practices that respect the authenticity of this

town that has developed organically over several centuries are now being introduced, making use of the considerable reserve of traditional crafts that survives in the Philippines.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Vigan in January 1999.

Qualities

Vigan is unique among the towns of the Philippines by virtue of the fact that it is the only one to preserve much of its Spanish colonial character intact. It is also significant because of the way in which distinct architectural traditions - European, Ilocano, Filipino, and Chinese - have fused to create a homogeneous townscape of great cultural importance.

Comparative analysis

Vigan belongs to a group of important South-East Asian trading cities in which Asian and European elements blend together, such as Malacca, Macau, Singapore, and Hoi An. Closest to it is probably Hoi An, where the same pattern of shop-houses influenced strongly from China can be observed.

Vigan is, however, unique in that it is the only town in this group in which the rigid Spanish colonial checkerboard street pattern survives intact. The only surviving parallels in this respect are to be found in Latin America, but these do not exhibit the multi-cultural fusion that Vigan demonstrates.

ICOMOS comments and recommendations for future action

The nomination of Vigan to the World Heritage List was first considered by the Committee at its 13th Session in Paris in December 1989. The Committee recommended that it should not be inscribed on the List, but exceptionally "suggested that the Philippine authorities contact ICOMOS and the Secretariat so as to study the possibility of elaborating a new nomination made up of particularly significant elements of the very special heritage of the Philippines" (Committee Report, XIV.46.C).

ICOMOS had recommended rejection in 1989 on the grounds that "this cultural property has not been shown to have sufficient exemplarity, and the urban and architectural quality of Vigan is in no way comparable to that of Spanish cities in the Caribbean such as Cartagena de Indias (Colombia) or Trinidad (Cuba)." ICOMOS now acknowledges that comparison with Spanish colonial towns in Latin America and the Caribbean is not a valid one: historic towns should be evaluated in a regional context rather than globally.

The expert mission that visited Vigan in January 1999 made a number of observations that should be referred to the State Party:

- Minor modifications are suggested to the delineation of the Core Zone. The Divine Word of Vigan College in the north-eastern part of the Core Zone, which is a modern four-storey structure, should be excluded, as should certain buildings used for inappropriate purposes (soft drinks store, petrol station).

- Similarly, the limits of the Buffer Zone should be modified so as to exclude the former Vigan Central School, now used as an extension of the bus terminal complex.
- The mission was concerned that the Vigan Heritage Commission created in 1996 is not fully operational, apparently for lack of professional personnel. There is also a duplication of responsibilities between the Commission and the National Museum, which is the agency to which all requests relating to protected historic buildings must be referred.
- The Municipal Ordinance to establish the Conservation Authority was close to being approved when the mission took place. Since it provides for the creation of a team of conservation professionals, a further source of duplication seems likely to be introduced shortly.

ICOMOS recommends that the State Party should be a. requested to modify the boundaries of the Core and Buffer Zones slightly, so as to make them more appropriate for World Heritage inscription, and b. establish clear lines of responsibility and authority for the existing and proposed agencies involved with the preservation of the historic town, so as to avoid potential duplication and conflict.

Brief description

Vigan is the most intact example in Asia of a planned Spanish colonial town, established in the 16th century. Its architecture reflects the coming together of cultural elements from elsewhere in the Philippines and from China with those of Europe to create a unique culture and townscape without parallels anywhere in East and South-East Asia.

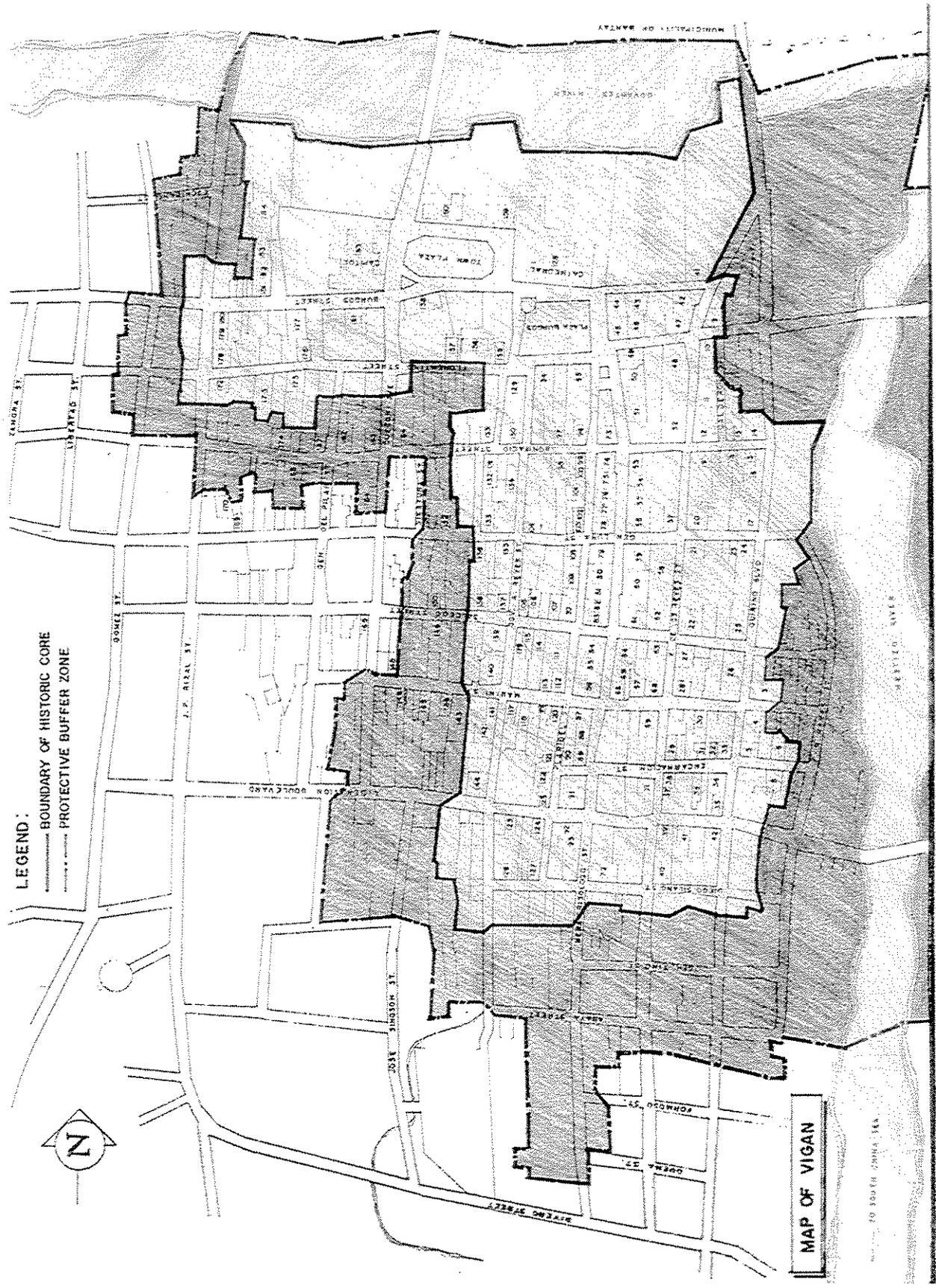
Recommendation

The Bureau recommended that this nomination should be referred back to the State Party, requesting modifications to the boundaries of the nominated area and its buffer zone, as suggested by ICOMOS, and an unambiguous statement of the proposed conservation structure, to be supplied by 1 October 1999. This information had not been received when this evaluation was prepared for printing. In the event of this information being supplied and found acceptable, ICOMOS recommends that the property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii and iv*:

Criterion ii Vigan represents a unique fusion of Asian building design and construction with European colonial architecture and planning.

Criterion iv Vigan is an exceptionally intact and well preserved example of a European trading town in East and South-East Asia.

ICOMOS, September 1999



La ville historique de Vigan / The Historic town of Vigan :
Plan du site / Site plan