

**Identification**

<i>Nomination</i>	The Historic Centre of Santa Cruz de Mompox
<i>Location</i>	Department of Bolívar
<i>State Party</i>	Colombia
<i>Date</i>	10 October 1994

**Justification by State Party**

With the scope of urban development during the Spanish Colonial period in northern South America (then called *Terre Firme*), several "unique artistic achievements" appeared. Cartagena de Indias is already on the World Heritage List; however, there are other Colonial towns in the same region which are also unique in the sense of being examples of urban types not found elsewhere in the area. This is the case of Mompox, a riverside town which was neither planned nor built according to the traditional grid found in nearly all the Colonial towns in New Granada (Colombia and part of Venezuela). Instead, it grew freely and longitudinally, following the sinuous path of a road roughly parallel to the river, distorting any "city blocks" along the way, like a European medieval town.

There is no other example anywhere else in Colombia of such an inspired urban development, dating from Colonial times, that has survived so completely as a collection of original religious and domestic architecture. None of the other towns along the Magdalena river came close to the original urban character and fine architecture of Mompox, which, within the geographical area of northern South America with its severe tropical climate and socio-economic constraints, is a first-rate artistic achievement. **Criterion i**

The influence of a town like Mompox on developments in architecture or town planning may be measured only in terms of its geographical region, in this case the lower Magdalena river basin, and its period, the late 16th to early 19th centuries. Since the Spanish empire in America was largely made up of isolated geographical and administrative regions, a strong influence on one might be non-existent in another.

The existence of Mompox as an intermediate river port on the main route from the port of Cartagena to the interior of New Granada provided the physical background for important cultural influences. Mompox became the main proving ground for the basic designs of religious and domestic architecture that were to appear in the neighbouring regions as well as in the Andean highlands of Boyacá and Cundinamarca, and as far as the coast of Venezuela.

No history of Colonial architecture in northern South America can fail to give Mompox a key role. Even today, the cultural interest and merit of Mompox depend largely upon the remarkable state of preservation of its Colonial urban design and architecture. Whilst the different capitals of New Granada, Santa Fé (Bogotá) or Tunja, had greater architectural and urban importance as cultural heritage, neither has survived to the present without losing most of the original urban fabric and a considerable part of their Colonial architecture. **Criterion ii**

Mompox is an outstanding example of both an architectural group and public or open spaces, long curving streets, an open market on the river bank, and strategically sited plazas. The cultural significance of this urban context may be evaluated by measuring it against an historic scale of social and urban forms or phenomena. With the possible exceptions of Bogotá, Cartagena, and Popayán, no Colonial town in New Granada can claim a higher degree of correspondence between Colonial social systems and class hierarchy on the one hand and urban scale and ambience on the other. By the mid 18th century Mompox had achieved a rare harmonious balance between the needs and the ideals of Colonial society.

The urban type of Mompox, the riverside town, has its roots in the Mediterranean in the classical period and migrated to the New World via Andalucía, where the towns along the Guadalquivir river provided the models for those who came to settle in the lower Magdalena river basin. Their task was to adapt what they remembered

of Europe to the harsh geographical and climatic conditions in their new homeland. European building traditions and spatial concepts were adapted in a masterly way to local materials and techniques. The technical qualities of the buildings of Mompox are only marginally surpassed by those in Cartagena.

Although the builders of Mompox chose the only slightly higher site in the region that was not subject to flooding, they faced tremendous odds. The town is an heroic effort as well as a successful island of European existence in the tropics. The very fact of the town's urban structure still being readable in its entirety is extraordinary but not inexplicable. Through its socio-economic decadence and virtual isolation during the latter half of the 19th and most of the 20th century, it escaped destruction. What can be read today is not only the urban or architectural ambience of Mompox but also its historical origins and the deep cohesion between its builders.

### **Category of property**

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Santa Cruz de Mompox is a *group of buildings*.

### **History and Description**

#### *History*

Mompox was founded in 1540 by Juan de Santa Cruz, Governor of Cartagena, who gave his name to the site. This occurred only seven years after the foundation of Cartagena and two years after that of the capital of the New Kingdom of Granada, Santa Fé de Bogotá. Its history forms an integral part of the processes of colonial penetration and dominion during the Spanish conquest and of the growth of communications and commerce during the 17th to early 19th centuries. It is a riverside settlement on the country's main waterway into the interior highlands, the Magdalena river, close to its confluence with the Cauca river, the other main communication waterway. The town was sited on one of the few areas of higher ground (33 m above sea-level) in a flat, swampy region subject to flooding.

The town grew along the banks of the river, on which walls were built to protect it during periods of high water. Instead of a central square or plaza to serve as a site for government, it had three plazas in line, each with its own church, and corresponding with a former Indian settlement. Mompox was of great logistic and commercial importance: traffic between the port of Cartagena and the interior travelled down the rivers, whilst overland routes also converged upon the town.

The growth of Mompox was favoured by the appearance of a ruling social class of colonists, often employed by the Colonial regimes and granted the privilege of possessing land and taking Indians as virtual slaves to work it (the *encomienda* system). The Indians were deprived of their lands and pushed into small reservations. However, this, coupled with the harsh climatic and geographical conditions, made farming and ranching difficult, with the result that there was no solid socio-economic basis for the town, which grew only slowly. It also attracted a motley population, among whom smuggling was a profitable way of life. Such growth as there was during the Colonial period was due to the relatively small number of more affluent burgesses, whose wealth came from farming and trade. A number came to Mompox from Cartagena, bringing with them craftsmen and artisans to supply their more luxurious needs. The clerics and members of the religious orders formed the other element of the ruling class in the town, and the churches and convents of the Augustinians, Dominicans, Franciscans, and, later, Jesuits came to dominate its monumental appearance.

The slow development of Mompox during the Colonial period is reflected in its urban consolidation. During the course of the 17th century it changed from a narrow linear settlement to a more two-dimensional arrangement of streets, linking lanes, and varied facades. It was the streets that determined the evolution of the urban fabric of the town, their roles being demonstrated by their names - La Calle Real del Medio (The Royal Central Street), La Calle de Atrás (The Street Behind), and Calle de la Albarrada (The Street of the Retaining Wall). Further growth was limited by the flood plain lying immediately behind La Albarrada. The progress that was made by Mompox is well illustrated by the mid 18th century historian Pedro Salzedo del Villas, who noted in his *Apuntamientos Historiales* that "the city contained six hundred houses and stores with brick walls and tile roofs

on most of them, all large and comfortable and well built; they are solid, generally one or two storeys, and have ample vestibules and gardens. There are nearly 1800 thatch-roofed houses and cottages altogether..."

With the early wars for independence and the ensuing civil wars in the first half of the 19th century Mompox began to fall into decline, as its upper-class citizens died or went into exile and farming was abandoned under the pressure of hostilities. The insecurity led to both the town and its region losing their socio-economic dynamism, and this was made worse by the gradual change of course by the Magdalena river, which left the town's river frontage stranded and deprived it of its identity as a river port. The result was economic stagnation, which lasted until the last decade of the 20th century, when tourism has led to some degree of revival.

### *Description*

The urban design of Mompox grew from its relationship with the river, which in a sense was its most important street for much of its history. The retaining walls (*albarradas*) are periodically interrupted by steps which function as piers; these are either at the ends of lanes or form private docks for individual large houses. They are built in brick and most date from the early 18th century.

They gave their name (Calle de la Albarrada) to the street bordering the river which links the three main squares: La Concepción, San Francisco, and Santa Bárbara. Each of these has its own church, and these churches served as forts in the early years of the settlement. The Church of La Concepción, construction of which began in 1537, is the mother church of the town. The Church of San Francisco is a little later, begun in 1564. The most interesting one is probably the Church of Santa Bárbara, dating from the late 16th century, whose delicate structure and spacious interior are complemented by its tower, the most outstanding architectural feature of the town. The port buildings and some important private houses, such as that of Los Portales de la Marquesa, are also in these squares. From the 17th century onwards houses were built on the Calle de la Albarrada with the ground floors given over to small shops.

The main thoroughfare is the Calle del Medio, where most of the grander houses are located. On the north side of the street are the church and hospital of San Juan de Dios (begun in 1555) and on the south the church and convent of San Agustín of around the same period. Residential blocks developed between these two main thoroughfares, but as the town grew in size it became necessary to create a new main street, the Calle de Atrás. For the most part the buildings in this part of the town are more modest in size and decoration. They are timber-framed, with wall fillings of wattle-and-daub in the technique known as Bahareque.

The cross streets linking the three main roads are secondary, though some contain important buildings. Calle 18 (or Auditor Street) is the most clearly defined, dividing the town in half. It is graced with a number of public spaces, including the squares of La Concepción (the town's main plaza from its foundation and its central market) and El Tamarindo, public buildings such as the Church of Santo Domingo and the Pinillos School, from the turn of the 18th century, and the cemetery. Squares such as Santo Domingo, San Carlos, El Tamarindo (or Bolívar), San Francisco, and La Aduana, evolved from unoccupied portions of the city block.

The spatial organization of the Mompox churches is simple, with outer walls in brick and the interior divided into three aisles by wooden columns or stanchions, in a New World adaptation of the traditional Spanish construction technique based on brick arches supported by stone columns or buttresses, to be found in Andalucía or elsewhere in New Granada. The wooden ceilings are in the style known in Spain as "Moorish art", with small modifications.

The private houses of the 17th to early 19th centuries are laid out round a central or lateral open space, creating linked environments adapted to the climate and local customs. The earliest type of house for merchants or Crown servants is that with a central patio; there is often a secondary patio for services attached at the back of the building. The house round a lateral patio (ie one lacking a structure on one side) is later and usually applied on smaller building plots or after the division of a central patio building. A subgroup results from the separation of part of a large central-patio house: a single long building divided up into smaller rooms opens out on to a long patio. A number of significant early patio houses, either intact or broken up into smaller dwellings, survive from the early period, and retain important features such as decorated portals and interiors, balconies, and galleries.

The "house-store" buildings which began to appear in the 17th century are built in rows of between three and ten units. Significant in their contribution to the townscape is the fact that the open hallways across the front share a common roof. Many have now been adapted to residential use.

## **Management and Protection**

### *Legal status*

Ownership of the historic centre of Mompox is shared between private individuals, institutions, the Roman Catholic Church (the Diocese of Magangué), and local government authorities. Unusually for Colombia, there is a tradition of retaining ownership of private houses within a single family in Mompox.

The historic centre was declared a National Monument under the provisions of Law No 163:1959, which covers the basic principles for the management and protection of the cultural heritage.

It has been regulated by a municipal building code since 1970, by means of which all construction work within the historic centre is strictly controlled. There are legal provisions to maintain and protect the urban and architectural heritage while adapting to new conditions and the needs of development. The current urban regulations for the historic centre, which devolve the responsibility for certain aspects of the protection of this historic property to local and regional authorities, were approved by the National Monuments Council in March 1994.

### *Management*

The Colombian Cultural Institute (COLCULTURA), part of the Ministry of Education, is the national agency responsible for the preservation of the historic centre of Santa Cruz de Mompox; it is advised by the National Monuments Council. COLCULTURA's Cultural Heritage Office carries out preservation projects through the Division of Historic Centres and Architectural Heritage and the Technical Secretariat of the National Monuments Council.

There is no management plan for the historic centre *per se*. However, the strict building codes of 1970, 1983, and 1994 and urban regulations, plus the supervisory role of COLCULTURA, exercise effective management of the area. There is control over the interventions by private owners within the historic area and specific functions are assigned to the different entities participating in its protection. This code is the model for all historic towns and town centres in Colombia. There is an effective buffer zone prescribed in the planning regulations.

A bill for the economic recovery and development of the Magdalena river basin was before the Colombian Congress in October 1994. This will result in Mompox having better communications with the rest of the country, which will lead, it is hoped, to economic development and likely expansion of the town. This eventuality has been taken into account in preparing the current building code.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

A considerable amount of restoration and conservation work has been carried out over the past three decades with government funding through the National Roads Institute. Projects include work on the following buildings: Church of San Francisco (1977-93); Cloister of San Agustín (1987-89, 1992-93); Church of Santa Bárbara (1993-); Cloister of San Carlos (1993-); Museum of Religious Art (1993); Church of Santo Domingo (1994-); Church of San Agustín (1994-); and City Council House (1994-).

The historic centre is generally in a good state of preservation. Private owners have considerable pride in their properties, which they maintain in good condition without government subventions. This was given recognition when the municipality was awarded the Medal of Institutional Merit as a model for other historic centres by COLCULTURA.

### *Authenticity*

By virtue of the fact that Mompox lost much of its economic importance in the 19th century it has not been subject to the pressures for redevelopment of the historic centre that have affected other towns of this type in northern South America. The original street pattern has been preserved intact, along with a large proportion of the earlier buildings. Its level of authenticity is therefore high in terms of form and material.

## Evaluation

### *Action by ICOMOS*

ICOMOS consulted its International Committee on Historic Towns and Villages on the cultural value of the town. An expert mission visited Mompox in February 1995.

### *Qualities*

The urban landscape and architectural components of Santa Cruz de Mompox achieved a high level of unity and harmony during the 17th-19th centuries, and this quality has been preserved owing to the economic stagnation of the subsequent period. Of especial importance (and very unusual in terms of Spanish colonial architecture in Latin America) is the fact that most of the buildings are still being used for their original purposes, the town centre having retained its original residential function.

### *Comparative analysis*

The special circumstances of the development of the town along the river have given it a special quality with few parallels in the region. The subsequent economic decline confers a further dimension on this quality, making it the most outstanding surviving example of this type of riverine urban settlement.

### *ICOMOS recommendations for future action*

ICOMOS referred to the Colombian authorities the following suggestions made by its expert mission:

- The restoration of the colours on the exteriors of the buildings in the historic centre should continue, on the basis of careful examination of the walls and the use of the same pigments as those originally employed;
- Removal of the market at present between the Concepción and San Francisco plazas and demolition of the later structures along the banks of the river here, so as to restore the character of this important part of the town;
- Conversion of the existing market building for use as a boat terminal, a tourist information centre, and perhaps a small commercial centre;
- Continuation of efforts to ensure cleanliness of the river banks;
- Selection of a single street paving system for the historic centre;
- Development of a detailed tourist plan;
- Redefinition of the area proposed for inclusion on the World Heritage List so as to make Calle 21 the northern boundary.

Undertakings and assurances were received by ICOMOS before the meeting of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee in July 1995 that all these points were being taken into account by the Colombian authorities. Agreement was also reached on the northern boundary of the site for inscription.

## Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iv and v*:

The historic centre of Santa Cruz de Mompox is an outstanding example of a Spanish colonial settlement established on the banks of a major river and serving an important strategic and commercial role which has survived to a remarkable level of intactness to the present day.

ICOMOS, September 1995



CONVENCIONES

CENTRO HISTORICO

LIMITE AREA DE INFLUENCIA

LIMITE CENTRO HISTORICO

LIMITE DEL RIO

	INSTITUTO COLOMBIANO DE CULTURA Colección de Patrimonio	Centro Histórico Santa Cruz de Mompox Colombia
	Subdirección de Patrimonio	Escala 1: 5000 Fecha MARZO / 1993
Contiene <b>BOUNDARIES OF THE HISTORIC CENTRE</b>		1

Santa Cruz de Mompox : plan indiquant la zone proposée et la zone tampon /

Map showing the nominated area and buffer zone



Santa Cruz de Mompox : église Sainte-Barbara /  
The Church of Santa Barbara