

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Itsukushima Shinto Shrine
<i>Location</i>	Hiroshima Prefecture
<i>State Party</i>	Japan
<i>Date</i>	28 September 1995

Justification by State Party

The magnificent shrine of Itsukushima-jinja was founded in the 12th century by the most powerful leader of the time, Taira no Kiyomori. The configuration of the shrine buildings presents an excellent architectural scene on the lines of the *Shinden-zukuri* style, the aristocratic residential style of the Heian Period (794-1185). The fruit of Kiyomori's prodigious imagination, the integrated beauty of these buildings, sited on the sea with impressive mountains in the background, is unique in the world of architecture. As an outstanding work combining man-made achievements and natural elements, the shrine is tangible proof of the great achievements of Taira no Kiyomori. **Criterion i**

The shrine buildings of Itsukushima-jinja are in the general tradition of Shinto shrine architecture in Japan, in which a mountain or natural object is enshrined as an object of religious belief to be worshipped from a shrine, generally constructed at the foot of the mountain. The shrine buildings in the nominated property are located on the sea, and the scenery, with a trinity composed of the man-made architecture in the centre, the sea in the foreground, and the mountains in the background, has become recognized as a Japanese standard of beauty against which any other example of scenic beauty should be evaluated. Because they are unique among extant shrine buildings in Japan, they provide invaluable information for an understanding of the spiritual culture of the Japanese people: the Japanese concept of scenic beauty. **Criterion ii**

Among these buildings, the Honsha Heiden, Haiden, and Haraiden and the Sessha Marōdo-jinja Honden, Haiden, and Haraiden, all constructed in the 13th century, survive, to express accurately the style prevailing at the time of construction in the 12th century, and are included among the few buildings constructed in the Kamakura period (1185-1333) that still exist in Japan. Even though they were subsequently reconstructed twice, they still tell us what the buildings constructed in the Heian Period were like, since they were scrupulously accurate reconstructions. The shrine buildings of Itsukushima-jinja have preserved the styles prevailing in the period from the late 12th century to the early 13th century and are important for us today as examples of the ancient type of shrine architecture integrated with the surrounding landscape, the physical manifestation of humankind's worship of nature. **Criterion iv**

Shintoism is a religion that centres on polytheistic nature worship, the origin of which goes back to primitive times. Over its long history it has developed into a religion which became unique in the world, adopting continental influences to combine with its own indigenous traditions. Japanese spiritual life is deeply rooted in this religion. As a Shinto shrine, Itsukushima-jinja provides important clues to the understanding of the underlying features of Japanese religion. **Criterion vi**

Category of property

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Itsukushima-jinja is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description*History*

Itsukushima Island is one of many in the western part of the Setonaikai (Seto Inland Sea), between the islands of Honshū and Shikoku. Because it has the region's highest mountain, Mount Misen (530 m), it has been worshipped by people in the region since ancient times: they felt such awe that they dared not set foot on it, worshipping

it from afar. However, their faith was so great that they were driven to construct shrines on the shores of the island on more than one occasion.

It is thought that Itsukushima-jinja was founded in 593, although its existence is not confirmed before 811. The *Nihon Kōki* states that *Itsukushima no kami* (the god of Itsukushima) took his place among the celebrated gods, and the Imperial Household began to present *hei* (sacred staffs with cut paper at the top) to the shrine. It became known as a sacred shrine in the country of Aki during the Heian Period (794-1184).

It is not known when building work began. However, it is recorded that Saeki Kagehiro, a Shinto priest, reported to the Imperial Court that he reconstructed the main shrine buildings in 1168: during this work the scale of the buildings was increased and the roofing of some was changed from shingles to Japanese cypress bark. This reconstruction, believed to have been financed by Taira no Kiyomori, the most powerful leader of the time, set the standards for subsequent reconstructions in both scale and composition. Kiyomori believed that he owed his successful record in the civil wars of Hogen and Heiji and his subsequent political promotion to his religious faith in Itsukushima-jinja, and the belief that the god of Itsukushima was a guardian deity of the Heike family deepened his veneration of the shrine, where he worshipped on every important political occasion of his life.

The reconstructed main shrine buildings were destroyed by fire in 1207 in the Kamakura Period (1185-1332) and reconstructed eight years later, only to be burnt down once again in 1223. This time the reconstruction took longer, not being completed until 1241; the major surviving shrine buildings date from this reconstruction. From this time onwards, total reconstruction of the complex became too large a task and so buildings were reconstructed on an individual basis. During the Kamakura Period the shrine was under the patronage of the feudal government, but in the succeeding Muromachi Period (1333-1572) this came to an end.

Since Itsukushima-jinja was built by the sea, it suffered repeated damage from wind and flooding, but each time it was restored with the support of influential people at national and local level throughout the ages. The Ōtorii (large shrine gate), set in the sea, was especially vulnerable and was frequently reconstructed, most recently in 1875. New buildings were also added to the main compound, to create the present ensemble - the Gojūnotō (five-storey pagoda) in 1407, the Tahōtō (two-storey pagoda) in 1523, the Sessha Tenjin-sha Honden in 1556, and the Massha Hōkoku-jinja Honden (Senjōkaku) in 1587.

Itsukushima Island has an important commercial role in the Inland Sea by virtue of its position. By the late Muromachi Period (1233-1573) a market had been opened on the island, round which an urban area developed. A Buddhist temple was erected near the summit of Mount Misen, and this also attracted many pilgrims and visitors. The island lost the somewhat forbidding character as a sacred island, reserved exclusively for the act of worship, that it had had in ancient times and became an open island possessing great beauty from its integrated landscape of religious buildings and natural features, so that by the middle of the Edo Period (1600-1866) it had become acknowledged as one of the Three Most Scenic Places in Japan (*Aki no Miyajima*).

Description

The buildings of Itsukushima-jinja consist of the main shrine buildings (Honsha), constructed and composed so as to achieve harmony within a single design concept, and the other buildings that have been added to them over a long period of history. Each building has high architectural quality in itself.

The architectural style of the north-facing Honsha buildings and the west-facing buildings of the Sessha Marōdo-jinja, connected by the Kairō (roofed corridor), was influenced by the aristocratic dwelling-house style of the Heian Period (*Shinden-zukuri*). The frontal view of the buildings, with the mountain as a backdrop, is emphasized: the entire area, from the Ōtorii in the foreground to the mountain in the background, resembles a succession of folding screens. The delicate forms of the red-painted buildings in front of the dark green of the mountain create a striking composition with sharp contrasts of colour and mass.

Like many other Shinto shrines that had constructed Buddhist buildings, Itsukushima-jinja lost many of them after the rejection of Buddhism with the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The few that survive in the surrounding hills are considered to be as indispensable to the history of Itsukushima-jinja as its Shinto monuments.

- Honsha

The Honsha buildings, consisting of the Haraiden, Haiden (worship hall), Heiden (*Hei* hall), and Honden (main hall) are on the axis of the Ōtorii. The Haraiden projects out towards the sea and the Haiden and Honden, linked by the Heiden and covered by a single roof structure, are ranged behind it, parallel to the sea. They give a calm and elegant impression with the delicate lines of their generously spreading eaves, the soft roof surfaces, and the horizontal lines of the floors, *nageshi* (horizontal tie-beams), and *kahiranuki* (head tie-beams). They are supported on structural frames composed of massive wooden columns and *kumimono* (brackets).

In front of the Haraiden is the Hirabutai (ceremonial platform), which is connected by a plank floor to the Higashi-kairō (east corridor) and the Nishi-kairō (west corridor) for access from other parts of the complex. The Hirabutai projects forward and is the setting for the Takabutai (stage), with vermilion lacquered balustrades on four sides. The court dances performed on this stage were brought from the capital in the Heian Period (794-1184) and have been preserved by the priests of Itsukushima for more than eight centuries.

- Sessha Marōdo-jinja

This shrine complex, located to the north-east of the Honsha group, faces west. Its components (Haraiden, Haiden, Heiden, Honden) are laid out in the same form as those of the Honsha, and are very similar in style.

- Other buildings

The nominated area contains the ancillary buildings, associated with Shintoism and Buddhism, that accreted over the centuries around the famous Shinto shrine. These include the Gojūnotō (five-storey pagoda), the Tahōtō (two-storey pagoda), the Sessha Tenjin-sha Honden, and the Massha Hōkoku-jinja Honden (Senjōkaku).

Management and Protection

Legal status

Seventeen buildings and three other structures belonging to Itsukushima-jinja and included in the nominated area are designated as National Treasures or Important Cultural Properties under Article 27 of the 1950 Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties. The area in which the buildings are located is designated as a Special Historic Site and a Special Place of Scenic Beauty under Article 69 of the same law. Part of the nominated area is also designated as a Natural Monument under Article 69.

Proposed alterations to the existing state of the designated buildings and area are legally restricted: any alteration must be approved by the national Government (under the terms of Articles 43 and 80 of the 1950 Law).

Most of the hinterland of the designated buildings is designated as a National Park Special Area under Article 17 of the 1957 National Parks Law, and an area of 418.2 ha is designated a City Park Area by Hiroshima Prefecture under the 1956 City Parks Law. These designations impose restrictions on tree felling and construction of buildings.

The upper area on the north slope of Mount Misen behind the designated buildings is designated as a National Park Special Protection Area under Article 18 of the 1957 National Parks Law and as a Special Wildlife Protection Area under Article 8 of the Law concerning Wildlife Protection and Hunting.

The entire area of Itsukushima Island is covered by wholly or partially overlapping designated zones under various statutes and regulations, intended to protect and preserve the natural and historic environments and to restrict any acts that might adversely affect their existing conditions.

Management

Ownership of the designated area is shared between the Itsukushima-jinja officially recognized religious organization and the Government of Japan, operating through the Ministry of Finance.

Owners of statutorily designated buildings are responsible for their management and repair. However, the national Government subsidizes these costs and provides technical guidance, through its Agency for Cultural Affairs. The national Environment Agency plays a similar role in respect of natural properties. Agencies and organizations associated with the protection and management of the designated area include the Forestry Agency, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Construction, Hiroshima Prefecture, the Hiroshima Prefectural Board of Education, Miyajima Town, and the Miyajima Town Board of Education.

Although there is no buffer zone *per se* defined in the nomination dossier, the very strict control over any form of development under complementary and overlapping legislative instruments means that the entire island is in effect an buffer zone for the nominated property.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

As with many Japanese historic buildings built entirely of wood, the buildings of the Itsukushima-jinja complex have been destroyed or damaged by fire on several occasions. On each occasion they have been restored to their original state with financial support from government or rich and powerful private citizens, following the traditional Japanese custom. Their location on the coast have also exposed them to constant attack from wind and water, which has made their continuous maintenance essential.

Following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, a policy for the protection of cultural property was given high priority by government, and the main buildings of Itsukushima-jinja were designated as specially protected buildings in 1889-1910 under the early protection legislation. They were divided into four zones, which have been the subject of state-subsidized restoration work continuously since that time, using highly skilled conservation architects, supervisors, and craftsmen.

In 1945 a landslide that started in the mountains behind Itsukushima-jinja resulted in part of the complex being buried or swept away. Rectification of the extensive damage to the ensemble, coupled with works to prevent damage from future natural disasters of this kind, went on until 1957. The massive structures required for this purpose were ingeniously disguised, so as to prevent their affecting the natural beauty of the site, by the use of traditional Japanese gardening techniques.

Maintenance and conservation work has continued on a systematic basis since that time. This was suspended when a violent storm accompanied by exceptional high seas caused severe damage in September 1991, including the loss of much of the Japanese cypress bark roofing material. Restoration work began immediately and was completed in 1993.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the Itsukushima-jinja monuments and setting are high and in complete accord with the principles enunciated in the Nara Declaration of 1994. The conservation and restoration work carried out there over more than a century is an outstanding example of the traditional Japanese philosophy and approach.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Itsukushima-jinja and studied it in detail in 1993.

Qualities

Itsukushima-jinja is the highest material expression of the traditional Japanese Shinto religion, in terms of both its individual buildings, which are of the highest technical and artistic quality, and its setting, which integrates the man-made element into the natural landscape.

Comparative analysis

There are many Shinto shrines in Japan, but it is universally acknowledged that Itsukushima-jinja is paramount among them.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, ii, iv, and vi*:

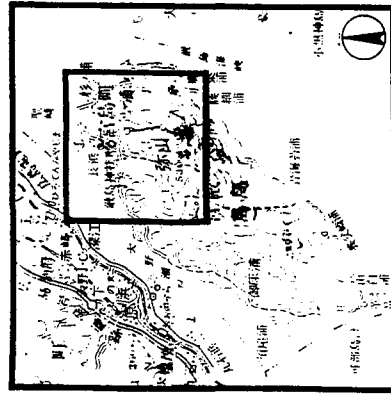
The Itsukushima Shinto shrine is the supreme example of this form of religious centre, siting traditional architecture of great artistic and technical merit against a dramatic natural background and thereby creating a work of art of incomparable physical beauty.

ICOMOS, October 1996

MAP INDICATING THE EXTENT OF THE PROPERTY

The Extent of the Property

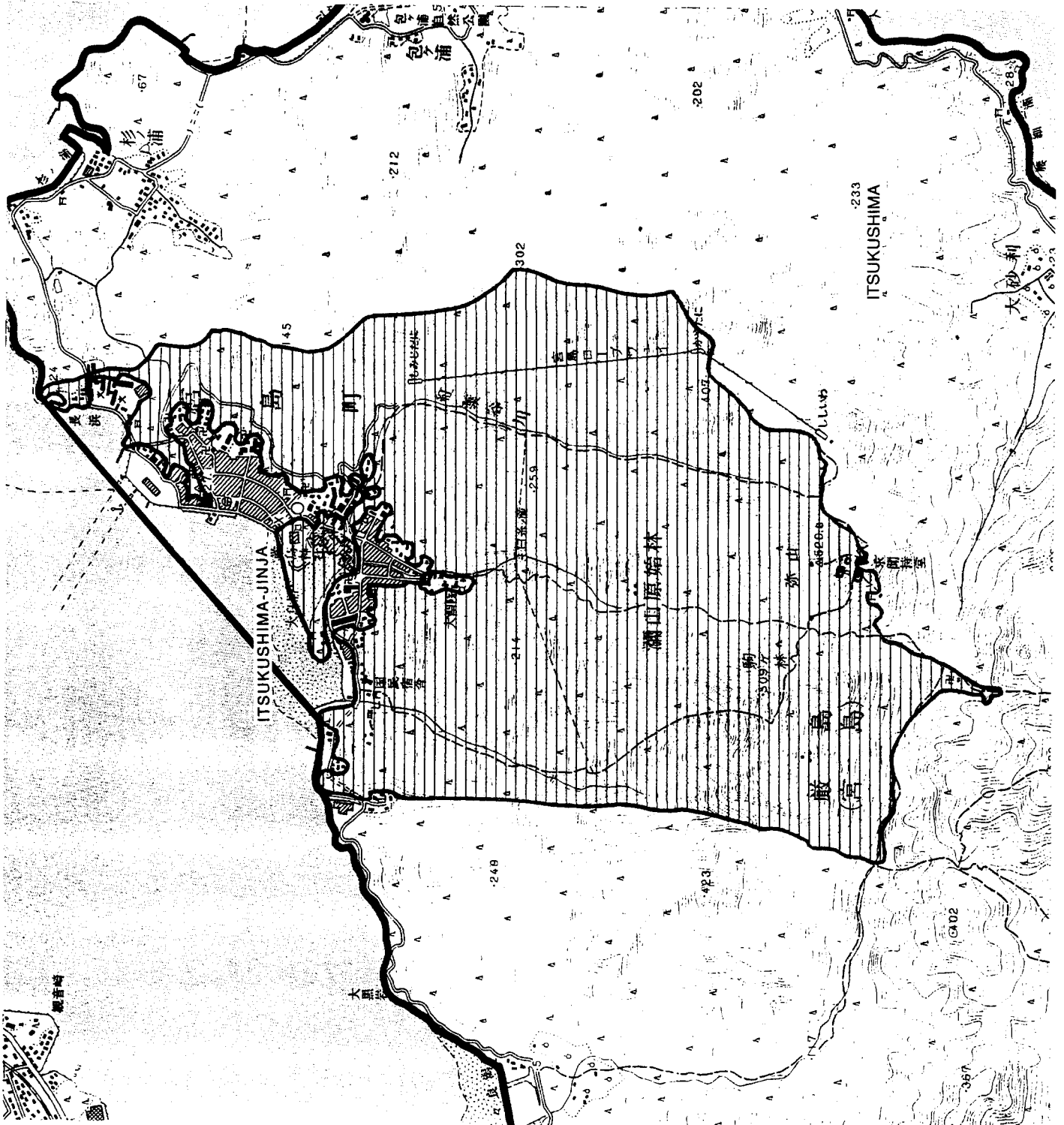
Nominated Property	431.2 ha
Nominated Property Buffer Zone	2,634.3 ha
Total	3,065.5 ha



1 : 150,000 0 1 2 km

NOMINATED PROPERTY

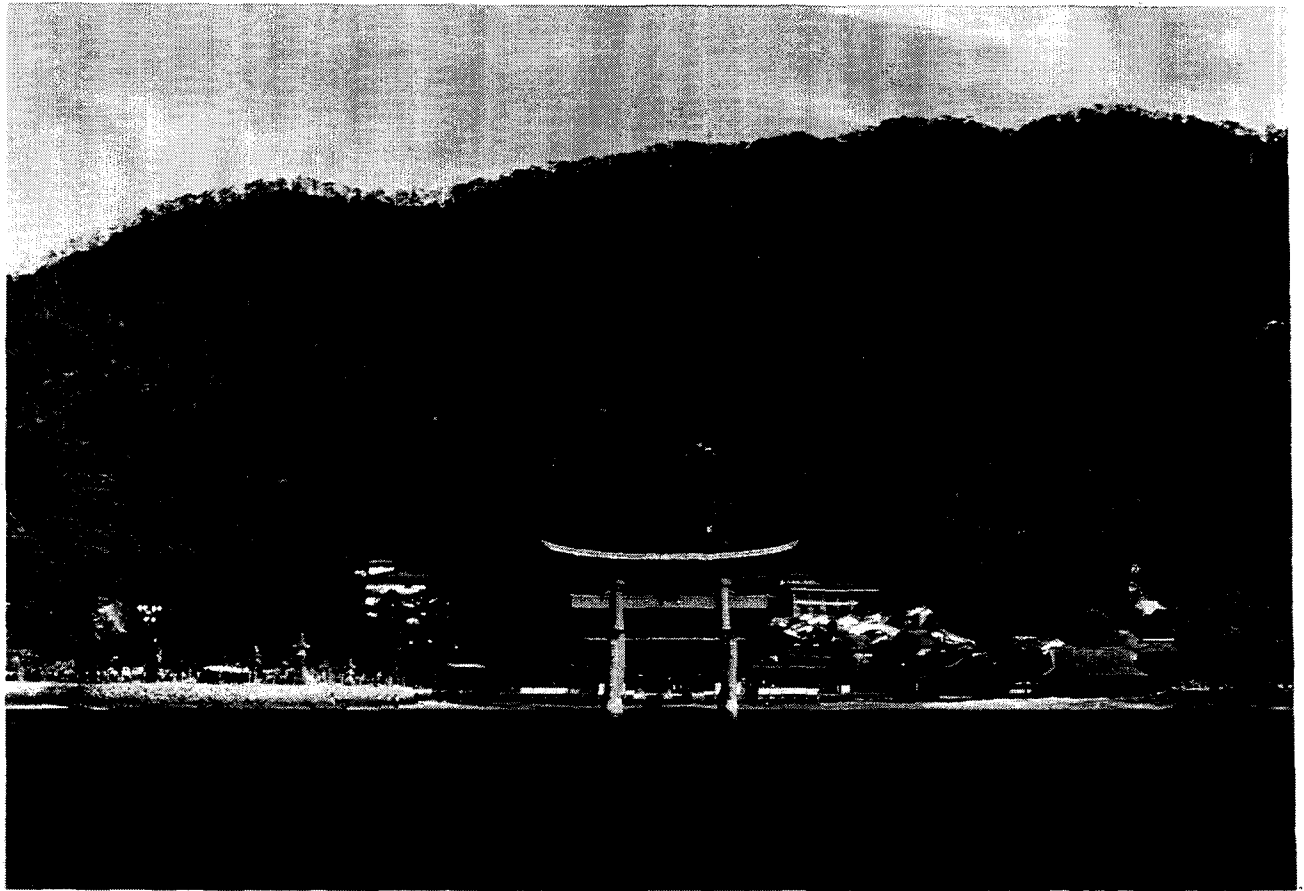
 NOMINATED PROPERTY BUFFER ZONE



1 : 15,000 0 500 1,000 m

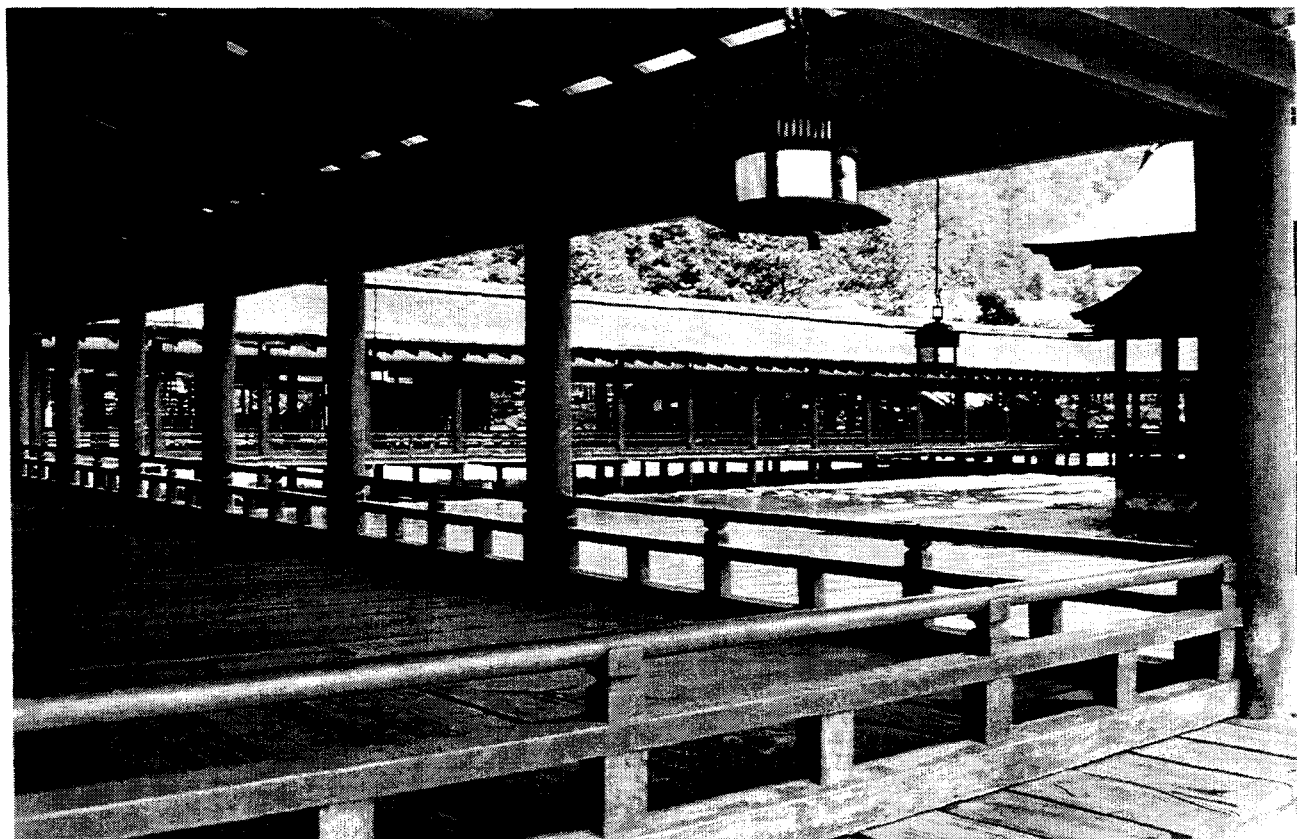
Itsukushima : plan de délimitation du bien proposé pour inscription et de la zone-tampon

Itsukushima : map of the nominated property and buffer zone



Itsukushima : vue d'ensemble

Itsukushima : general view



Itsukushima : Nishi-kairô