

**Identification**

<i>Nomination</i>	The Historic City of Meknes
<i>Location</i>	Wilaya of Meknes
<i>State Party</i>	Kingdom of Morocco
<i>Date</i>	26 October 1995

**Justification by State Party**

The historic city of Meknes has exerted a considerable influence on the development of civil and military architecture (the *kasbah*) and works of art.

It also contains the remains of the royal city founded by Sultan Moulay Ismaïl (1672-1727). The presence of these rare remains within an historic town that is in turn located within a rapidly changing urban environment gives Meknes its universal value.

**Note** The State Party does not make any proposals concerning the criteria under which the property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List in the nomination dossier.

**Category of property**

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the historic city of Meknes is a *group of buildings*.

**History and Description***History*

The name of Meknes goes back to the Mekkassa, the great Berber tribe that dominated eastern Morocco to as far as the Tafilliet and which produced Moulay Idriss I, founder of the Moroccan state and the Idrissid dynasty in the 8th century AD.

The Almoravid rulers (1053-1147) made a practice of building strongholds for storing food and arms for their troops; this was introduced by Youssef Ben Tachafine, the founder of Marrakech. Meknes was established in this period, at first bearing the name Tagrart (= garrison). The earliest part to be settled was around the Nejjarine mosque, an Almoravid foundation. Markets congregated around the mosque, specializing in firearms, woodwork, metal products, etc. Like other settlements of the time, Meknes was not fortified: walls were not added until the end of the Almoravid period.

The town fell into the hands of the Almohad dynasty (1147-1269) at the start of their rule: it was taken by an army led by the Caliph Abdelmoumen in person. During this period it was enlarged and urbanized. An inscription states that the Great Mosque was enlarged during the reign of Mohamed Annacer (1199-1213). Water from the Tagma spring was brought to the town to serve the various fountains, baths, and mosques. At that time there were four sets of baths (*hammam*), the location of which indicates how the town had spread.

During the subsequent Merinid period (1269-1374) Meknes absorbed the suburbs that had grown up round it. Refugees from the Moorish centres in Andalusia that fell to Christian forces also helped to swell the population, among them a significant Jewish community. Following Merinid practice, Abou Youssef (1269-86) built a *kasbah* (only the mosque of which survives) outside the old town, as well as the first of the three *medersa* (Islamic schools) with which the Merinid rulers endowed Meknes. Other public buildings from the Merinid period included mosques, hospitals, libraries, and fountains.

The founder of the Alaouite dynasty, Moulay Ismaïl (1672-1727), made Meknes his capital city and carried out many reconstructions and additions, such as mosques, mausolea, and gardens, but his main contribution was

the creation of a new imperial city. Built in the Hispano-Moorish style, it is impressive in both extent and construction. It is enclosed by high walls pierced by monumental gates. Within are the palace with its enormous stables, a military academy, vast granaries, and water storage cisterns.

#### *Description*

The nominated area of Meknes is that which constituted the capital city during the reign of Moulay Ismaïl. The high defensive walls are crossed by means of the monumental gates: Bab Mansour Laâlej, Bab Lakhmis, Bab Berdaïn, Bab Jdid, etc. Within there are many religious buildings, especially the many mosques from successive periods (Nejjarine, Lalla Aouda, the Great Mosque, Lalla Khadra, Sidi Saïd, Bab Berdaïn etc) and the *medersas*. Some of the *fondouks* (inns) that cluster around the gates were devoted to specific crafts or trades: for example, the Fondouk Hanna dealt solely with henna, whilst the Jewish craftsmen worked at the Fondouk Lihoudi. Certain quarters were reserved for specific trades and activities.

The nomination dossier lists over eighty buildings and other structures singled out for special protection. They include the aqueduct of Bab Berdaïn, eighteen private houses, twenty-five mosques, nine city gates, and ten *hammams*.

Different building techniques, materials, and decorative motifs predominated in successive periods, which may be summarized as follows:

- Almoravid Period (5th-6th centuries)
  - Pisé exterior walls constructed on wooden frameworks
  - Brick walls (coursed or herringbone)
  - Brick relieving arches
  - Wooden ties (especially on minarets)
  - Lime mortar
  - Mosaics only in green and white
  - Decoration: Interlacing, five-pointed stars
- Merinid Period (7th-8th centuries)
  - Wooden curtain walls
  - Brick domes and vaulting
  - Plastered round or broken arches
  - Wooden eaves
  - Plank floors
  - Metal-studded wooden doors
  - Carved and turned wood
  - Sculpted plaster
  - Multi-coloured paintwork, *champlevé*
  - Multi-coloured window glass
  - Marble sills and basins
  - Decoration: geometric, floral, epigraphic, wrought iron
- Alaouite period
  - Monumental structures - pisé walls 1-6 m thick, brick barrel vaults, wooden or brick framing, wooden or plaster eaves, pyramidal tiled roofs
  - Carved and painted plaster and wood
  - Wrought-iron grills
  - Decoration: carved doors and door-frames, painted wrought iron.

#### **Management and Protection**

##### *Legal status*

Various elements of the historic city have been listed as protected historical monuments since 1913 by Royal Decree (*Dahir*) or Vizierial Order. The Vizierial Order of 23 September 1922 imposes controls over development within the historic city: all proposed changes must be authorized by the Head of the Historic Monuments Service. This regulation has been extended and strengthened by a number of later measures.

## *Management*

Ownership of properties making up the historic city of Meknes is spread between the state, religious institutions, the urban communes of Meknes, and private individuals.

The *Inspection régionale des monuments historiques*, which is part of the Cultural Heritage Directorate of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, has a supervisory role and carries out research, training of workers, and overseeing of restoration and rehabilitation projects, on the basis of annual prioritizing programmes. Relatively light financing is available from central government funds, but this is supplemented from other public sources and from private institutions and individuals.

An overall plan for the protection and rehabilitation of Meknes is currently in preparation.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

Although various conservation projects have taken place in Meknes since the early years of the 20th century, it was not until 1960, after Morocco had achieved independence, that systematic conservation and restoration work using modern techniques was first undertaken. Since that time a number of major projects have been carried out on important monuments.

The conscientious *Étude architecturale de la Medina de Meknes* forms the basis for policy-making. It contains analyses of many of the major buildings with recommendations for action.

### *Authenticity*

The layout and urban fabric of Meknes are entirely authentic. Some restoration and conservation work carried out earlier in the 20th century was responsible for introducing inappropriate materials and techniques into ancient buildings. Since 1960, however, such work has been in conformity with modern conservation practice, and the overall level of authenticity in materials and workmanship is good.

## **Evaluation**

### *Action by ICOMOS*

ICOMOS consulted its International Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages on the cultural significance of the site. An ICOMOS expert mission visited Meknes in February 1996.

### *Qualities*

The exceptional cultural value of the historic city of Meknes resides principally in the fact that it was the capital of the Alaouite Sultan Moulay Ismaïl, who replanned and largely rebuilt it to conform with that function. As a result it is an outstanding example of the approach to urban design at this period, incorporating elements from both European and Islamic architecture and layout.

### *Comparative analysis*

At a meeting held at Fez (Morocco) in April 1985, organized by ICOMOS and attended by official representatives of Algeria, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, and Tunisia, a priority list of sites on the tentative lists of these States Parties was drawn up. Meknes was one of the eleven priority Islamic sites chosen by the experts present at that meeting.

### *ICOMOS observations*

The report of the ICOMOS expert mission drew attention to the fact that no land-use planning study has yet been carried out at Meknes. It is understood that this is in preparation, with French assistance.

**Recommendation**

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *critterion iv*:

The historic city of Meknes represents in an exceptionally complete and well preserved way the urban fabric and monumental buildings of a 17th century Maghreb capital city which combines elements of Islamic and European design and planning in a harmonious fashion.

ICOMOS, October 1996



Meknès / Meknes : place El Hedim /  
El Hedim Square