

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

São Luís do Maranhão (Brazil)

No 821

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Historic Centre of São Luis
<i>Location</i>	State of Maranhão, North-East Region
<i>State Party</i>	Brazil
<i>Date</i>	16 July 1996

Justification by State Party

São Luis was founded by the French, having already been visited by the Spanish, looking for a possible route to Eldorado, and was conquered and ravaged by the Dutch before being finally colonized by the Portuguese, consolidating their hold over the whole territory of Brazil. The town's future, and that of its people, sprang from these beginnings, to play an active role in the life of the colonial state of Maranhão, with its direct commercial and administrative links with Lisbon.

São Luis was the port for handling the exports of the entire northern region, a major producer of textiles, until the mid 20th century, giving the town a significant role in the national culture, represented by the work of its poets, writers, and politicians and in material terms by its urban fabric of open spaces and dwellings.

It was the setting for the struggle to assert national identity and evolved its own architectural style from that of Portugal. The Maranhão house is distinct from the rest of colonial architecture in Brazil both by the opulence of the materials used and by its adaptation to the natural environment. The unique nature of this form of construction results from the elegant coloured tiles (*azulejos*) used both for heat insulation and for decoration and from the relationships between living and open spaces, underlined by the use of decorative stone, mouldings, cornices, fountains, and corridors. The interiors are distinguished by their balconies protected, by grilles, the thickness of the walls, and the varied ceilings.

São Luis grew in accordance with the plan laid out by the engineer Francisco Farias de Mesquita in 1615. It diverged in places from the classical schema in order

to conform with topographical exigencies, but the overall result was to the benefit of the whole without prejudice to its ensemble of facades, roofs, and gardens. This, the largest colonial urban and architectural ensemble in Latin America, with over four thousand buildings representative of its whole history, is unquestionably one of the most successful examples of the way of life in 18th and 19th century Brazil.

Paradoxically, this huge cultural heritage has been preserved to the present day as a result of the economic crisis that overcame Maranhão from the 1920s to the 1970s. Throughout that period there were no public or private funds available for what is known as "urban renovation," in which old architectural groups are replaced by modern structures, such as the tower blocks of over ten storeys to be found in other Brazilian towns.

Today substantial capital investment has resulted in significant socio-economic changes in Maranhão. The establishment of production and exportation facilities or aluminium, the creation of the Port of Itaqui as the export terminal for the iron ore from the Carajás region, farming activities in the Central-Southern part of the State, and the new aerospace centre at Alcântara, are the principal economic factors in the refashioning of the socio-cultural profile of Maranhão and its capital.

The main administrative, financial, and commercial functions of the capital come together in the Historic Centre. It is the epicentre of a metropolitan region that now has over one million inhabitants. This provides a rare opportunity for the protection and preservation of its precious cultural heritage. The State Government has made considerable efforts to find viable solutions. Over the past twenty years dozens of city blocks, more than two hundred buildings of historic interest, and two large 19th century industrial buildings have been adapted for modern use. Other legislative and institutional measures are currently being applied in order to improve and protect the heritage. However, because of the continued expansion of the city and the large areas that are still in a precarious condition, the State Government and the Municipality of São Luis are obliged to carry out works unceasingly in order to guarantee the continuity of the preservation programmes that are already under way. Contacts are currently being made with national and international bodies in order to ensure that the necessary financial resources are available.

At the present time the economy of the planet is in course of being reorganized and internationalized, resulting in the dismantling of old frontiers. The inscription of São Luis on the World Heritage List would constitute an important element in the recognition by the international community, represented by UNESCO, of its cultural value as living testimony to the history of the occupation of South America.

[Note The State Party does not make any proposals in the nomination dossier concerning the criteria

under which it considers the property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List.]

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

In 1612 two Lieutenants of Louis XIII of France, in the service of Marie de Médicis, were instructed to set up a colony in this region, as part of the policy of creating an "Equinoctial France" in Brazil. Daniel de la Touche, Seigneur de La Ravardière, and his associate François de Razily, Seigneur de Razily et Aunelles, built a fort on the site of the abandoned Capitania de Maranhão on the island of Trindade, known to the Tupinambás Indians as Upaon-açu. Historians assert that there had been a Portuguese and Spanish village, known as Nossa Senhora de Nazaré, since 1531. The new fort was named Fort Saint-Louis in honour of the French king.

The French were well received by the 27 tribes living on the island, but they were there for only two years. The Portuguese Jerônimo de Albuquerque drove them out in 1615 after the battle of Guaxenduba. However, less than three decades later Maranhão again attracted an European colonial power. Emissaries of Maurice of Nassau, from The Netherlands, took possession of the town in 1641 and held it until 1643, when the native spirit re-asserted itself. A resistance movement was organized by a local leader, Muniz Barreto; he was killed during the struggle against the Dutch invaders, but his successor, Teixeira de Melo, held the town until the Portuguese returned.

As early as 1615, when the French had been driven out, the Chief Engineer of the State of Brazil, Francisco Frias de Mesquita, visited São Luis to draw up plans for new defences of the liberated town. In addition, he prepared an urban plan, and this was used as the guide to its expansion and development. It was based on geometric regularity (perhaps the first of its type in Brazil), in contrast to the medieval layout of narrow winding streets applied by the Portuguese in Rio de Janeiro, Recife, and Olinda. It was to serve as the basis for the expansion of what was from the early 17th century the capital of Maranhão up to the end of the 19th century.

By the end of the 17th century São Luis had a population of some ten thousand, a figure that had risen to seventeen thousand a century later. The economy of the town underwent profound changes during this period, owing to a number of measures taken by the Marquês de Pombal, Prime Minister of King José I. The most important of these were the introduction of trade in black slaves and the creation in 1755 of the Companhia Geral de Comércio do Grão Pará e do Maranhão. São Luis and Alcântara,

the main shipping ports for the region, were integrated into the world trading system, exporting rice, cotton, and other regional products. The wealth that ensued led to a cultural flowering in both towns.

As São Luis developed in the 18th and 19th centuries the early houses in pisé and straw were replaced by solid structures in mortared stone and finished with lime, fish oil, wood, and marble brought from Portugal. Features adapted to a humid tropical climate were introduced, such as wooden verandas. The use of *azulejos* for cladding the exteriors became one of the most characteristic features of the architecture of São Luis.

It was the first town in this region of Brazil to install a tramway system, to set up a water and electricity company, to light its streets with gas, and to have a telephone system. Its prosperity was enhanced by the establishment of a number of textile companies, which have left their mark in the form of imposing industrial buildings.

However, the 20th century saw a long period of economic stagnation. All expansion came to an end in the 1920s and the town of that period was effectively what is now identified as the Historic Centre of São Luis. This was in fact a major factor in allowing the town to retain its historic framework and features.

Description

The Historic Centre of São Luis do Maranhão, nominated for the World Heritage List, consists of the original core of the town, dating from the late 17th century, and the inner areas of urban expansion from the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. It covers 200ha and is situated at the end of the promontory formed by the confluence of the Bacanga and Anil rivers

The buildings of the town are disposed on the rectangular grid of streets laid out in the 17th century. The private houses are built round courtyards, and the most outstanding examples have tiled roofs, facades faced with Portuguese *azulejos* or painted, ornamented cornices, tall narrow window bays with decorated surrounds, and balconies with forged or cast iron railings. The floors are of dressed stone. Features relating to the tropical climate in which they were built include raised piers and shuttered verandas on the inside.

There are some four thousand buildings within the Historic Centre. They may be classified into three categories.

The sumptuous *manor houses* were built by the rich middle classes in the 18th century. Common features include dressed stone door and window openings, some embellished with classical decorative elements, triangular pediments, curved balconies, marble facades, and wrought-iron grilles. Inside there are vestibules with marble or river-pebble floors. A main staircase provides access to the upper storeys in which the family lived, the ground floor being reserved for housing coaches and services.

The *multi-storey houses*, sometimes up to four storeys in height, are mostly faced with marble. Balconies

run right across the facades, in front of the windows. They have elegant wrought- or cast-iron balustrades.

The third group, that of *small houses*, is sub-divided into "full dwellings", with a central doorway and a window on either side; "half dwellings," with a doorway at one end and two windows side-by-side; and simple "door and window" dwellings. They are either single- or two-storeyed. Despite their modest form, many have facades decorated with *azulejos*.

In addition to the dwelling houses that make up the greater proportion of the town's stock of historic buildings, there is a number of public buildings from the 19th and early 20th centuries, which are largely in neo-classical style. These include the Palace of Lions, the seat of government of the State of Maranhão (on the site of the original Fort Louis), and the Arthur Azevedo Theatre.

The economic stagnation of the earlier part of the 20th century has resulted in the historic urban fabric having been preserved to a remarkable degree. Only two buildings in unexceptionable modern style disturb the overall view.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The Historic Centre of São Luis do Maranhão is designated as a National Monument under the provisions of Federal Law No 25 of 30 November 1937 on the Architectural and Landscape Heritage. It is also protected under State Law No 3999 of 5 December 1978. Both statutes require authorization of works likely to affect the townscape of São Luis adversely.

Management

Ownership of properties within the Historic Centre of São Luis do Maranhão is spread over national, state, municipal, and religious authorities and private owners.

Construction of bridges over the Anil and Bacanga rivers led to a move out of the historic centre, as a result of which a number of buildings deteriorated alarmingly. To counteract this, the municipal and State authorities introduced a series of measures. Designation as a National Monument in 1974 was a basic step.

In 1987-89 a programme for the preservation and revitalization of the Historic Centre was implemented, with an investment of the equivalent of US\$ 25 million. This has been followed by a series of other programmes with the same objectives.

The work is coordinated by the Coordenação Regional of the Instituto Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (IPHAN) of the Federal Ministry of Culture. This body consists of a multidisciplinary team (architects, engineers, historians, etc) with its own annual budget that is responsible for the protection, restoration, and revitalization of the Historic Centre (as designated under Federal legislation).

The corresponding body within the Maranhão State administration (DPHAP/MA) works alongside the Federal agency, concentrating on the area protected by State rather than Federal legislation.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Until the late 1960s the only form of conservation resulted from the designation of some individual buildings as National Monuments. Positive action for the entire town was initiated with the creation of the Maranhão Cultural Foundation in 1971. A UNESCO expert made a proposal for the preservation of both São Luis and Alcântara in 1973, and this was followed by the establishment of various agencies and departments at State and municipal level and, in 1980, the Federal agency IPHAN. A ring road was built to divert traffic from the centre and buses were banned from it.

Between 1990 and 1994 the State Government funded three major projects forming part of the Programme for the Preservation and Vitalization of the Historic Centre of São Luis. These were the restoration of the Arthur Azevedo Theatre, built in 1816 and the second oldest in Brazil, which was in a ruinous state; the restoration and conversion into an educational centre of the impressive Fabrica do Rio Anil, the finest 19th century industrial building in the town; and a pilot project for the complete rehabilitation of an important building that was in ruins and its refitting as accommodation for ten families.

The Programme is currently working on the rehabilitation of the Desterro and Portinho quarters and the revitalization of port activities.

The Historic Centre, as nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List, consists of the compact core of the old town, under the management of IPHAN. There is an extensive buffer zone, comprising the area designated under State legislation and managed by DPHAP/MA. Some later port installations, gardens, and sports grounds on the west side (on the bank of the Bacanga river) are omitted from either zone, but development there is controlled by the municipal authorities.

In its report, the ICOMOS expert mission (see "Action by ICOMOS" below) commented very favourably on the comprehensive nature of the series of plans that have been and are being implemented by the agencies involved and on the manifest commitment of all concerned (including the local population) to the preservation and rehabilitation of the Historic Centre.

Authenticity

There is no statement regarding the authenticity of the nominated area in the dossier. The report of the ICOMOS expert mission (see "Action by ICOMOS" below) comments that the authenticity of materials and substance in buildings, street pattern and layout, and urban spaces is high, and is respected by official bodies and inhabitants alike.

So far as authenticity of design and form is concerned, there had been some unfortunate pastiche using modern *azulejos* as a result of misguided municipal directives in the 1970s, but this had now been brought to an end. The measures taken to ensure authenticity of use and function were commended.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited São Luis do Maranhão on 28 October-1 November 1996. ICOMOS also consulted its International Committee on Historic Towns and Villages and experts in this field in the ICOMOS National Committee for Argentina.

Qualities

The Historic Centre of São Luis do Maranhão is an outstanding example of a Portuguese colonial town of a type more commonly associated with Spanish colonial town planning. The integral pattern of streets and open spaces is preserved in its entirety. There is a high proportion of buildings of high individual quality, which acquire a more significant quality when treated as a townscape ensemble. The urban complex is also perfectly integrated with its setting at the junction of two rivers.

Comparative analysis

An ICOMOS comparative study of historic towns in the former Spanish and Portuguese colonies of Latin America is currently in progress. It is hoped that this will be completed by the time of the meeting of the World Heritage Committee in December 1997. However, there is a general consensus among experts consulted by ICOMOS that São Luis do Maranhão is likely to score highly in this comparative study.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

Two important points emerged from the ICOMOS expert mission.

First, reservations were expressed about the quality of urban life that will ensue when the present admirable conservation, restoration, and rehabilitation programme is completed.

Secondly, eventual inscription on the World Heritage List is likely to result in a considerable increase in tourism to São Luis.

ICOMOS therefore draws the attention of the State Party to the need in future planning projects to pay special attention to the social regeneration of the historic centre, and also to the potential threats that mass tourism may present.

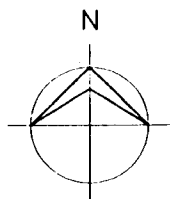
Recommendation

That, subject to a favourable evaluation in the forthcoming ICOMOS comparative study, this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii, iv, and v*:

The Historic Centre of São Luis do Maranhão is an outstanding example of a Portuguese colonial town that adapted successfully to the climatic conditions in equatorial South America and which has preserved its urban fabric, harmoniously integrated with its natural setting, to an exceptional degree.

ICOMOS, September 1997

Sao Luis do Maranhao :
Plan de la ville indiquant la zone proposée pour inscription /
Town plan, showing area proposed for inscription



MINISTERIO DA CULTURA - MNC
Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional - IPHAN
3ª Coordenação Regional - São Luís MA

**CENTRO HISTÓRICO DE SÃO LUIS
MARANHÃO**
- SITUAÇÃO ATUAL 1997 -
ÁREA CENTRAL

BRASIL - INSTITUTO GEOGRÁFICO E
CARTOGRAFICO - IBGE
CARTOGRAFIA - 1997
CARTOGRAFIA - 1997

Elaboração do Centro Histórico de São Luís
A.123 - Carta de 1/3.000

BRASIL - INSTITUTO GEOGRÁFICO E
CARTOGRAFICO - IBGE
CARTOGRAFIA - 1997
CARTOGRAFIA - 1997

COORDENAÇÃO DE PESQUISA E PLANEJAMENTO DO CENTRO
HISTÓRICO DE SÃO LUIS - CPHSL
1997-2000

BRASIL - INSTITUTO GEOGRÁFICO E
CARTOGRAFICO - IBGE
CARTOGRAFIA - 1997
CARTOGRAFIA - 1997