

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Torun (Poland)

No 835

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The medieval town of Torun
<i>Location</i>	Voivodate of Torun
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Poland
<i>Date</i>	19 July 1996

Justification by State Party

During the course of the urbanization of eastern Europe in the 13th and 14th centuries, a number of settlement problems were resolved in an original, creative way. Torun, which was granted an urban charter in 1233, set a standard for the evolution of towns in the region. The combination of two towns with a castle is a rare form of medieval settlement agglomeration.

The unique spatial layout of Torun has survived almost intact, and provides valuable source material for the history of town development in medieval Europe. It is an outstanding masterpiece of the human creative mind.

Criteria i and ii

Torun displays evidence of cultural contacts with the leading centres of European art, and in particular that of the large mercantile cities of northern Europe such as Bruges and Ghent. It therefore bears witness to the interchange and creative adaptation of artistic experience, and in particular among the Hanseatic towns.

Criterion ii

The many medieval buildings that survive in Torun represent the highest achievements of medieval architecture in brick. Some of them, moreover, influenced the evolution of certain types of building.

Criteria ii and iv

In the 13th century Torun played a fundamental role in the conquest, christianization, and colonization of Prussia. It was a major element in the trade of the Hanseatic League with eastern Europe. It also served as a critical focus for the emergence and self-

recognition of the medieval middle class and its eventual overthrow of the feudal state of the Teutonic Order.

Criterion vi

Category of property

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

History and Description

History

Torun is situated in the region known in the Middle Ages as the Land of Chelmino (*Terra Culmensis*), which acted as a buffer zone in the 12th and early 13th centuries between Poland and the regions occupied by the pagan Prussian tribes. It was granted a town charter in 1233, at that time for a site 7km down the Vistula river from which it moved to that part of the Old Town lying between the Old Town Square and the river in 1236. It progressively expanded during the 13th century to occupy the area of the Old Town, and was enclosed by defensive walls.

A fort had been built in the early medieval period to the south-east of the town, facing the river, and this was rebuilt in the mid 13th century by the Teutonic Order as a castle. The original function of Torun was to act as a base for the conquest and colonization of Prussia by the Order. However, the Old Town had quickly developed as a major commercial centre for trade between the Baltic and eastern Europe, along the Vistula to towns such as Pskov, Novgorod, and Vladimir. This commercial role, trading grain, timber, metals, furs, and wax in exchange for western cloth, fish, and luxury goods, expanded as the century proceeded. Torun became the leading member of the Hanseatic League in the territories ruled by the Teutonic Order. The New Town developed from 1264 onwards to the north of the castle and the east of the Old Town, mainly as a centre for crafts and industry.

The peak of Torun's prosperity was in the second half of the 14th and the first half of the 15th century. At the same time tension developed between the citizens and the Teutonic Order, leading eventually to an uprising in 1454, followed by the expulsion of the Knights and the incorporation of the town and its surrounding region into the Kingdom of Poland. The town gained a number of privileges as a result, but lost its commercial supremacy to Gdansk.

Two periods, 1350-1410 and 1470-1520, stand out in the cultural and artistic history of Torun. It was one of the most important artistic centres, in particular in respect of architecture, in this part of Europe. The town was endowed at this time with many architectural masterpieces, which were to exert a powerful influence on the whole Teutonic state and neighbouring countries. It is worthy of mention that

the great astronomer, Nicholas Copernicus, was born in Torun in 1473 and spent his youth there.

The Swedish wars and the crisis in Poland in the 17th century brought Torun's prosperity to an end. It came under Prussian rule in 1793, when it became known under its German name, Thorn, and was transformed into the main fortress on the frontier between Prussia and Russia. After World War I it was part of the reunited Polish state.

Description

The three elements of historic Torun that comprise this nomination to the World Heritage List - the Old Town, the New Town, and the ruins of the Teutonic Castle - form an irregular pentagon on the right bank of the Vistula river, and can be clearly distinguished in the contemporary town plan.

The *Old Town*, which forms the western part of the complex, is laid out around its central Market Place (*Rynek Staromiejski*). The street pattern to the south, up to the river, is regular, with five parallel streets running down to the river intersected by cross-streets. The part to the north is also based on perpendicular streets, but they are laid out in a less regular fashion.

The main feature of the Market Square is the imposing Old Town Hall, built in 1391-99 using some elements, including the tower of 1274, from its predecessor. An additional storey was added, in full conformity with the Gothic form of the building, in 1602-5. The ground floor of the west wing of the building, with its fine brick vaulting, served as a cloth hall.

The Parish Church of St John (which has been the cathedral of Torun since 1992) was built in stages. The choir and nave were built in 1270-1330, the nave was lengthened in 1388, the tower was added in 1407-33, and the nave was raised in height and revaulted in 1471-97. This fine brick Gothic church contains 14th century wall paintings.

The Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, formerly the church of the Grey Friars (Franciscans), dates in its present form from around 1350. It, too, contains 14th century wall paintings, as well as some fine Baroque furnishings.

The Old Town was fortified progressively between 1250 and 1300 with a double wall strengthened by bastions; these fortifications were largely reconstructed in 1420-49. The walls were partly dismantled in the 19th century, but most of the southern sector, facing the river, survives intact, with a number of gates and towers standing.

In the *New Town* the Parish Church of St James is another fine building in late Gothic style, built in 1309-40 and extended in 1359-1450. Its interior contains many Baroque furnishings. The Blackfriars (Dominican) Church of St Nicholas was almost entirely demolished in the 19th century. However, the remains of the church and its cloister have been excavated and laid out as a public park.

Most of the *Castle of the Teutonic Order* was destroyed during the uprising of 1454. The remains have been excavated and laid out for public presentation as a museum.

Both the Old and the New Town are rich in fine medieval burgher houses built in brick. Many of them retain their original Gothic facades, as well as their interior fittings (partition walls, ceilings, painted decoration). Because of the survival of so many houses from this period, the medieval plots are for the most part still preserved, delineated by their original brick boundary walls. The fine house in which Copernicus was born in the Old Town is preserved as a museum devoted to the man and his work.

Like contemporary burghers' houses in other towns in the region, many of those in Torun were used for both residence and commerce, with storage facilities. It also contains some remarkable brick granaries, in some cases rising to eight storeys in height.

Management and Protection

Legal status

There are 245 monuments, mostly medieval, in the nominated area that are protected by inclusion on the official Register of Monuments, which is given legal force under the provisions of the 1962 Law on the Protection of Cultural Property and Museums. In 1994 the entire area was further protected by the Regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland on the Recognition of the Historical Complex of Torun as an Historical Monument. This national protection is reinforced by the Local General Management Plan for the City of Torun, which was approved by the City National Council in October 1986.

All work on historic buildings must be evaluated and approved by the office of the City Inspector of Monuments before it may proceed. That office has at its disposal a wide range of specialist skills and services from local and central organizations. Archaeological excavations come within the purview of the Regional Inspector of Monuments.

Management

Ownership of properties within the nominated area is diversified, being shared by national and local administrations, church authorities, and private individuals and organizations.

Responsibility for the overall management of the historic complex is vested in the City Administration. Specialized services are provided by the City Inspector of Monuments and the Regional Inspector of Monuments, both based in Torun, with a generalized oversight exercised by the Principal Inspector of Monuments of the Ministry of Culture and Art in Warsaw.

Additional technical expertise is provided by the Institute for the Protection and Conservation of the Cultural Heritage in the Fine Arts Faculty of the Nicholas Copernicus University, Torun.

Funding for conservation and restoration projects is provided by central and regional government, the City Administration, and private enterprise. The City makes an award annually for the best restorations financed by private capital.

The Local General Management Plan for Torun, which is currently being updated, makes full provision for the preservation of the historical heritage.

The nominated area is surrounded by a buffer zone, which is considered by ICOMOS to be adequate and appropriate to protect the setting of this historic town. It consists of an area around the historic town itself, which is designed to provide clear panoramas from the landward side. The other part is on the right bank of the Vistula, providing excellent views across the river and also establishing a zone in which no obtrusive construction may take place.

It is relevant to add that the surroundings of the modern urban agglomeration are protected or managed so as to create a "green belt," formed by the Kępa Bazarowa nature reserve, the protected landscape at the confluence of the Drweca and Vistula Rivers, and the large areas of municipal woodland to the west and north, which merge at the boundaries of the town with the parks and squares of its 19th and 20th century suburbs.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

A concern for the heritage of Torun on the part of the City Administration can be traced back as far as the 16th century. In the first half of the 19th century a number of projects aimed at establishing the historic values of buildings were undertaken by the Prussian Government, with the participation of experts such as Karl-Friedrich Schinkel.

Following the appointment of the first State Inspector of Monuments in Prussia in 1885, the first inventory of the monuments of Torun was prepared and published. In 1892 the monuments in the town came under the control of the Prussian Provincial Inspector of Monuments, based in Gdansk. The post of City Inspector of Monuments was established in 1918, when the first city regulations concerning conservation and restoration were promulgated. In 1920 responsibility for the monuments passed to the Polish conservation services and a number of projects were set in train on the Church of St John, some of the burgher houses, and the Teutonic Castle.

The town suffered almost no damage during World War II. Since the end of the war there have been continuing efforts to conserve and restore the heritage of Torun, especially in the last two decades. Of especial importance has been the scientific investigation of buildings, thereby revealing much that was hitherto unknown about their history, construction, and later development. This has provided information that has been invaluable in subsequent conservation and restoration projects. The quality of the work carried out has been high

and fully in keeping with the principles of the Venice Charter.

Authenticity

Because of the concern felt for the appearance and conservation of the town for at least two centuries and the absence of serious damage during World War II, the authenticity of the townscape of Torun and of the individual buildings that compose it is high. This situation has been even further enhanced by the existence within the town of highly qualified conservation specialists, both among the responsible officials and in the Nicholas Copernicus University

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Torun in October 1996. ICOMOS also consulted its specialist International Committee on Historic Towns and Villages.

Qualities

Torun is an exceptionally well preserved and complete example of a medieval central European trading and administrative centre. The urban fabric is intact, the town retains a very high proportion of buildings of considerable intrinsic merit, and the level of conservation and restoration work carried out there for at least a century is of outstanding quality.

Comparative analysis

Torun is one of many medieval urban foundations in central Europe, established in a period when Christianity was being carried to the peoples of eastern Europe by the military Teutonic Order, but also when trade between the countries around the Baltic and the eastern lands was growing at a great rate, within the framework of the Hanseatic League.

As a Hansa town it can be compared with, in particular, Visby and Tallinn by reason of its completeness and level of conservation. It differs from them primarily in terms of its site, as a river port rather than a sea-port. Like Visby (which is already on the World Heritage List), it has played little part in European social or political developments since the late Middle Ages.

If the town is to be compared with others founded in the same period in central Europe, attention needs to be focused on, for example, Quedlinburg, Cracow, or Prague, all of which are on the World Heritage List. Like each of these (and, indeed, most medieval towns in central Europe), Torun developed around a castle and the urban sector was composed of more than one independent township in its early stages of development. It differs significantly from each of the towns mentioned above however, in various ways. It did not achieve administrative importance, like Prague or Cracow, or become the favoured residence of a powerful ruler, like Quedlinburg.

If it is compared with other World Heritage towns on the territory of modern Poland, it also presents

several significant features. Its authenticity is total, unlike the reconstructed Old Town of Warsaw, and it does not have the special Renaissance cultural features of Zamosc.

An important feature of Torun is the relationship of the town to its surrounding landscape, including the valley of the Vistula and the Kepa Bazarowa nature reserve, which preserves to a considerable extent the form and appearance of its medieval origins.

It is worth noting that the report of the ICOMOS expert mission comments very favourably on the level of authenticity and on the very high quality of the conservation work carried out in Torun by comparison with the other Polish cities on the World Heritage List.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

The ICOMOS expert mission report drew attention to the need for a reappraisal of the conservation and presentation of the ruins of the Teutonic Castle. New techniques have been developed since this work was originally carried out which should be applied so as to improve the conservation, and also the appearance, of the excavated remains.

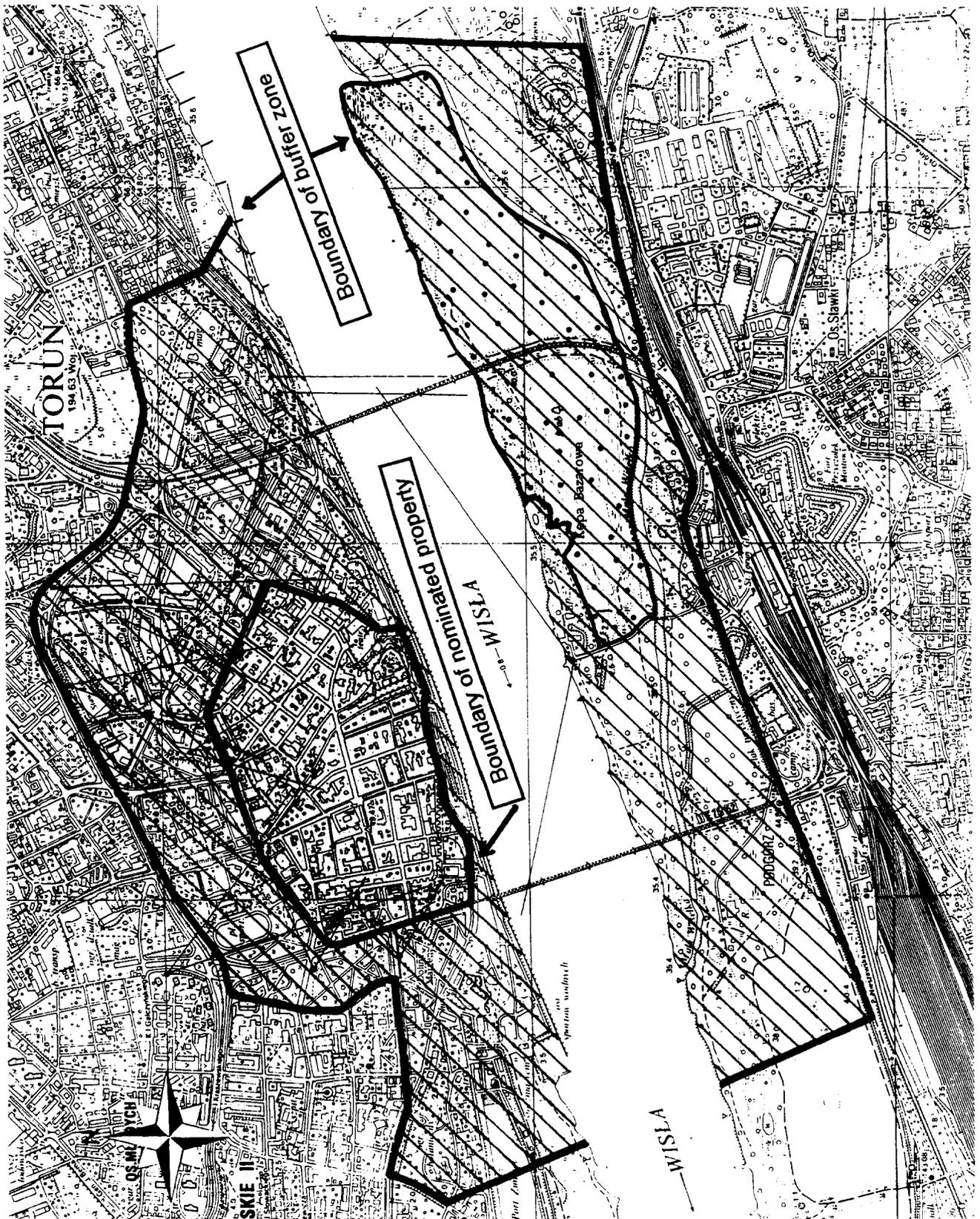
The report also commented on the impact of the construction of the main Oslo-Athens European highway, which will pass on the outskirts of the town. This will relieve the pressure of through-traffic on the historic centre. ICOMOS hopes that the earliest opportunity will be taken to implement the proposal to restrict vehicular access to the historic town.

Recommendation

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

Torun is a small historic trading city that preserves to a remarkable extent its original street pattern and outstanding early buildings, and which provides an exceptionally complete picture of the medieval way of life.

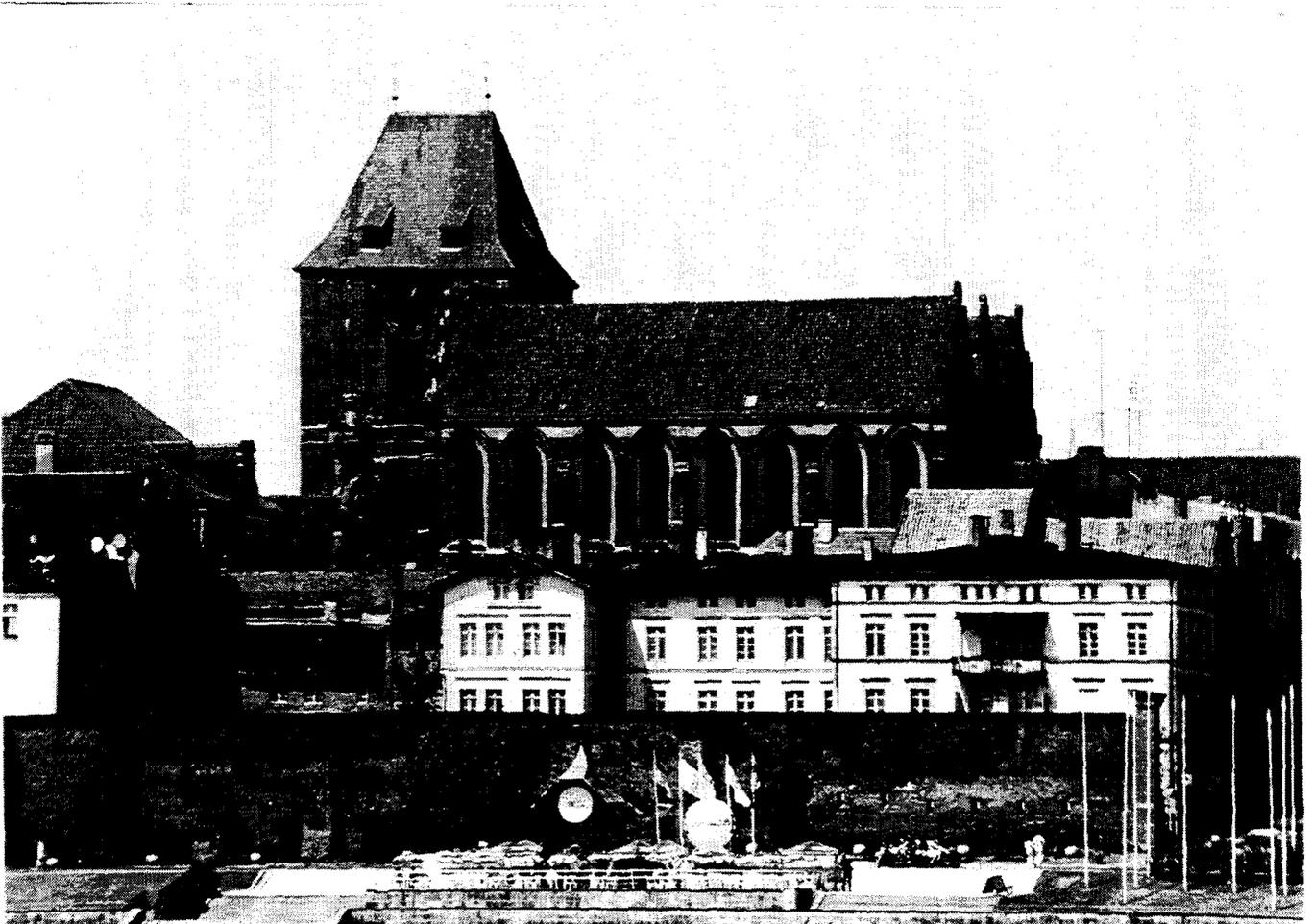
ICOMOS, September 1997



Torun :
Carte indiquant la zone proposée pour inscription et la zone tampon /
Map showing nominated area and buffer zone



Torun :
Vue aérienne du centre historique / Aerial view of the historic centre



Torun :
Cathédrale Saint-Jean dans la Vieille Ville / St John's Cathedral in the Old Town



Torun :
Partie des défenses médiévales /
Part of the medieval defences