

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Flemish Béguinages

No 855

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Flemish Béguinages
<i>Location</i>	Flanders Region Provinces of Antwerp, Limburg, Eastern Flanders, Western Flanders, and Flemish Brabant
<i>State Party</i>	Belgium
<i>Date</i>	16 June 1997

Justification by State Party

Béguinages: Urban development and architectural and cultural aspects

The establishment of *Béguinages* (Beguine convents) in Flemish cities and the spatial organization they reflect are related to medieval concepts of urban development which were widespread internationally. The "city" type adopts either the "chessboard" layout specific to new towns or a more organic development, depending on the possibilities offered by local topography. The "courtyard" type has more in common with the rural world, offering a simple meadow or square in the centre of the village, around which stand public, religious, civic, and private buildings. In both types enclosing walls, possibly even a moat, and gates stress the desire to set such small towns-within-a-town apart and to erect a boundary between two different worlds.

The religious, socio-economic, and cultural functions of the *béguinages* and the development of these functions is reflected in both the general and the specific layout of the buildings, and their architectural form takes its inspiration from the traditional architecture of the region, using its materials, proportions, and forms as appropriate.

Their conception as an enclosed social unit, providing for both the spiritual and the material needs of a specific community, has led to comparisons with the Augsburg *Fuggerei*, built in 1516-25 by Jakob Fugger, the famous banker of the reign of Charles V in the *Jakobervorstadt* section of the medieval German city. The ensemble is surrounded by a wall with three gates and adopts a standard geometric city plan, including church, infirmary, school, administrative cen-

tre, and 52 houses providing 106 residential units destined for craftsmen, journeymen, the poor, etc, all segregated in this way from the city centre. The foundation, sometimes interpreted as a "ghetto for the needy created by a well-meaning patron," is also frequently seen as a precursor of the workers' quarters of the 19th century.

Removed from the increasingly commercialized and humdrum historic centres, the *béguinages* preserved a respect for habitat as an essential function and have thus retained, apart from certain generally superficial modifications, the characteristic organization and simple functional architecture that gives them their particular atmosphere of a utopian setting in which a sense of community and respect for individuality are finely balanced.

Such qualities have not gone unnoticed in recent history, at crucial periods in the development of architecture and urban planning. In the face of burgeoning international modernism, the rediscovery of traditional architecture at the beginning of the 20th century offered an alternative, encouraging the creative interpretation that was to lead to a new style of architecture rooted in local traditions, which would be manifested in the regionalism of the period between the two World Wars. The very organization of the *béguinages*, with all the many variations on the courtyard and city types, and all the permutations thereof, as well as their inventive approach to incorporating green spaces, gardens, and "natural" plantations, was seen as the time as a model and an inspiration for the garden-cities to come, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s.

During the invasive "Golden 1960s" the utopia of the *béguinages* once again provided a frame of reference and matter for reflection, not only in terms of urban renewal, but also for the creation of the new town, organic, varied, and pedestrianized, that was to become Louvain-la-Neuve, designed as a home for a newly created university population as well as for ordinary citizens. It is interesting to note that Professor Raymond Lemaire was simultaneously in charge of both the restoration of the *Grand Béguinage* of Leuven and the Louvain-la-Neuve project.

The conservation and restoration work carried out in the *béguinages* ever since the ground-breaking initiative at Leuven in 1963-64 follow in the direct line of doctrine and practice in the field and offer different methods of approach and management which have implications at both regional and international level.

Criteria ii and iv

Béguinages: Centres of spirituality, solidarity, femininity, and modernity

In the evolution of our society, the *Béguinages* illustrate the presence, from as early as the Middle Ages, of generations of "religious women" (*mulieres religiosas*), either unmarried or widowed, seeking to lead a personal life of far greater independence than that permitted to women who were often married against their will, within a community which imposed certain rules but showed greater respect for the individuality of its members. Such communities existed alongside but separate from the traditional religious orders with their vows of perpetual enclosure and

poverty. The status of Beguines gave these much respected women a cultural and social role to play within their community, combining self-government with a form of democracy: the Beguines elected their superior, the *Grande Dame*, who was supported by a council which managed the general affairs of the community, which consisted of the superiors of the convent and the infirmary, each of whom managed her own organization and economy. Omnipresent is the desire to harmonize daily life, a sometimes extreme spirituality, and a solidarity that extended beyond their own "city of peace" into "good works" and "good citizenship" in that period of the history of the city, of which their own community was, after all, an integral part. That ambivalence has never ceased to intrigue lay commentators, feminists, and specialists such as Julia Kristeva, who have all sought to understand, identify, and relate their attitude and "desire for happiness" with the very essence of femininity.

On a religious level, the Beguine movement shows a certain evolution away from the mystical tendencies of the Middle Ages towards a spiritual life which, although remaining individual, was more organized (communal religious services at set times, regulations) and controlled by the Church after the Counter-Reformation. The *béguinages* themselves, in their 17th-18th century forms, can be seen to become increasingly bourgeois. The regrouping that followed the French Revolution and the new impetus derived from the Catholic Revival of the latter half of the 19th century added a certain amalgam of popular piety and bigotry where, occasionally, both Beguines and bigots were involved and which was peculiar to the period.

Although the Beguines themselves produced little art, apart from some poetry showing a sometimes naïve mysticism and certain typical artefacts (*gesloten hofjes*), small enclosed reliquary cases containing effigies of saints, objects of devotion, flowers and embroideries, touching in their spontaneity and innocent taste, they nonetheless stimulated the artistic output of their time as well informed commissioners of works of art and remarkable organs destined for their churches. Their choices in that respect reflect a level of culture open to the movements and events of their times.

The movement today is all but extinct, but most of the *béguinages* continue to be sought after as havens of peace and settings appropriate to a lifestyle that is a blend of community and private. The *Béguinage* of Brugge is the only community to have retained its religious vocation, having been run since 1927 by Benedictine nuns who wear the habit of the Beguines and who uphold in part, though within a recognized and stricter order, the ideals of their predecessors, combining spirituality, charity, and hospitality (for which a charge is made). As in the past, the door is still closed every day at the prescribed times, a practice also still followed at the *Béguinage* of Mont-Saint-Amand.

Criterion v

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Flemish Beguine convents are *groups of buildings*.

History and Description

History

The spontaneous emergence of the Beguine movement around 1200 reflects the current of religious renewal which swept western Europe at the beginning of the 13th century and in which women played an important role. In addition to the many women who entered the religious life by way of the convents, others developed an original "semi-religious" way of life in which they could dedicate themselves to God without withdrawing entirely from the world.

Among these *mulieres religiosæ*, neither nuns nor simple laity, of Northern Europe, the Beguines began to lead an individual or community life devoted to prayer, caring for the sick, and manual labour. Established for the most part in urban communities, they occupied houses near the hospitals and leper hospitals. Unmarried or widowed, they took no vows and were free to come and go in society and to withdraw from the community at will.

Although they enjoyed the protection of prelates such as Bishop Jacques of Vitry, and despite their close links to their confessors or spiritual directors (Cistercians, Franciscans, and Dominicans), they were never recognized as a conventual order or as a regular congregation. Their precise canonical status remained a matter of some debate throughout the 13th century.

In such a climate of suspicion, from 1230 onwards the Beguines began setting up their own institutions. The religious and secular authorities of the Flemish region favoured the establishment of enclosed *béguinages*, inside or outside cities, which were placed under surveillance. Each *béguinage* adopted its own rules in the matter of prayer, behaviour, work, housing, management of the infirmary, or the Table of the Holy Spirit (the Table of the Poor).

The *béguinage* was supervised by a Beguine, commonly known as the *Grande Dame*, who was elected for a limited term and was in many *béguinages* assisted by a council. Whilst the life of the *béguinages* was characterized by simplicity and humility, it by no means ruled out personal possessions: wealthier Beguines built or rented their own houses, others lived in community houses, and the poorest lived in the infirmary. In all cases, each had to provide for her own keep, and many worked in the textile industry. After a time, most of the *béguinages* were elevated to parish status and were assigned their own priest.

In other regions, such as along the Rhine Valley, Beguines who lacked the support of lay or religious benefactors continued to live alone or in community houses in different parts of the town.

The mistrust aroused by the strength of the Beguine movement and the development of feminine spirituality, which was also expressed in literary texts (such as the *Visions* of Hadewijch van Antwerpen, c 1240) and which could be seen as a threat to the authority of the Church, was made manifest at the Council of Vienna (1312) in the condemnation of the Beguines.

In the Rhine Valley regions, this and other subsequent condemnations were applied with vigour against the

Beguines. In the Flemish region, however, the Beguines for the most part enjoyed the support of the religious authorities. The investigation into the orthodoxy of the *béguinages* carried out by the bishops at the request of Pope John XXII in 1320 was in their favour.

The religious problems and political crisis suffered by the Lowlands in the 16th and 17th centuries also had their impact on the *béguinages*. The institution disappeared completely in the Calvinist provinces of the north (except for Amsterdam and Breda), but was maintained in the southern parts of the Lowlands which remained Catholic. From the middle of the 16th century, bishops won over to the ideas of the Counter-Reformation and supported by the conventual orders re-established the old discipline in the *béguinages*, which enjoyed something of a revival in the following century, despite the damage many suffered during the Dutch Revolt (1568-1648). Construction and restoration work intensified as the number of Beguines increased.

The decline of the movement first became apparent in the 18th century and gathered pace after annexation by France in 1795. Although French legislation and anti-clerical policy was interpreted differently by the local powers, the *béguinages* were secularized and their possessions and management handed over to the municipal commissions of the civil hospices. Only a small number of *béguinages* survived.

The fate of the *béguinages* in the 19th century differed from one area to another and depended on the attitude of the urban authorities and the municipal commissions of the civil hospices. The Beguines retained possession of their houses on a personal basis, with the unoccupied houses taking in the poor. Occasionally, they managed to buy back some of their houses via intermediaries, and to rebuild limited communities.

Elsewhere, former *béguinages* were taken over by religious orders. In Gent, the Beguines enjoyed the support of the Church and of Duke Engelbert von Arenberg, who purchased the *Petit Béguinage* and had the *Béguinage* of Mont-Saint-Amand built (1873) to house the Beguines from the *Grand Béguinage*, which the city authorities were threatening to dismantle. In many of the *béguinages*, community houses and infirmaries were gradually turned into hospices, orphanages, schools, etc.

Repeated attempts by the Beguines to recover their property throughout the 19th and 20th centuries proved fruitless, and the movement withered away. Many *béguinages* suffered damage during World Wars I and II. Today, most *béguinages* are still clearly defined components of the urban fabric, and some still form an essential part of the architectural heritage of many cities. These havens of tranquillity still fulfil a function as living space and around a dozen Beguines still live there.

Description

The proposed inscription concerns twenty-six *béguinages* in the five Flemish provinces, as follows:

- Province of Antwerp:
Antwerp, Herental, Hoogstraten, Lierre, Mecheln (*Grand Béguinage* and *Petit Béguinage*), and Turnhout.
- Province of Limburg:
Borgloon, Saint-Trond, Tongeren, and Hasselt.
- Province of Eastern Flanders:
Alost, Termonde, Gent (*Grand Béguinage*, *Petit Béguinage*, and *Béguinage* of Mont-Saint-Amand-lez-Gand), and Audenarde.
- Province of Western Flanders:
Brugge, Dixmude, and Kortrijk.
- Province of Flemish Brabant:
Aarschot, Diest, Leuven (*Grand Béguinage* and *Petit Béguinage*), Overijse, and Tirlemont.

The 26 Flemish *béguinages* proposed for the World Heritage List are not all preserved in their entirety. Many have been partially dismantled (Antwerp, Hasselt, the *Petit Béguinage* of Leuven, the *Petit Béguinage* of Mecheln, Herentals, Aarschot) or largely incorporated into the urban fabric of the vicinity (*Grand Béguinage* of Gent). Certain suffered damage during either World War I or II (the *Béguinage* of Dixmude was rebuilt during the 1920s, whilst Aarschot, partially rebuilt after 1944, still has four of its original houses, and the church of Hasselt was destroyed in 1944). Of the *béguinages* of Overijse and Borgloon (where the Beguines never really succeeded in establishing a true *béguinage*), only the church remains. The period houses of the *Béguinage* of Alost were demolished and rebuilt during the 1950s.

The Flemish *Béguinages* founded in the 13th century (Hoogstraten at the end of the 14th century) were often built on the banks of a watercourse and most were initially outside the city walls. As the cities expanded, the *béguinages* found themselves within the new walls. The *Grand Béguinages* of Mecheln and Antwerp, both destroyed in the 16th century, took refuge in a quarter of the city offering empty houses or space for new building.

No complete construction remains from the Middle Ages, with the exception of certain churches. The earliest Beguine houses, built of timber frames and *pisé*, were replaced by municipal ordinance by buildings of brick or stone in the latter half of the 16th century and, particularly, in the 17th century, although they generally followed the original layout and area. In the 17th century, the rising numbers of Beguines dictated further construction within the space originally available. In the 18th century, the number of Beguines declined and houses were demolished. New houses or buildings were incorporated into some *béguinages* in the 19th and 20th centuries, such as the new convent of the Benedictine nuns into the *Béguinage* of Brugge (1937) or the residential building that replaced houses destroyed in 1944 in the *Grand Béguinage* of Leuven (1994-95).

The *béguinages* formed miniature towns, enclosed by walls or surrounded by ditches, with gates opening to the "world" during the day. The *béguinages* were organized according to one of two models: one, the city type, reflecting on a smaller scale the model of a medieval city, with a plot set aside for the cemetery, or the square where the church is built (Lierre, Diest, Tongeren, etc); the other, the courtyard type, with a central area, varying in shape and often consisting of a lawn planted with trees, where the church is located, and around which the houses are aligned (Brugge, Turnhout, etc; Hoogstraten has two courtyards, as did Antwerp originally). A third or mixed type, the result of certain extensions in the 17th and 18th centuries, combines both layouts (the *Petit Béguinage* of Gent or the *Grand Béguinage* of Leuven).

The *Béguinage* of Mont-Saint-Amand-lez-Gand occupies a special position among the *béguinages* proposed for inclusion on the World Heritage List in that it was built (1873-74) as a global project adopting the traditional concepts of the *béguinages* and a neo-Gothic architectural style.

The *béguinages* consist of gates and/or gate-houses, a church, an infirmary, the house of the *Grande Dame* or Council, the Table of the Holy Spirit (or Table of the Poor), of houses and community houses (known as "convents"), a farm and other agricultural or industrial buildings (barn or brew-house), green spaces, and a presbytery close to the *béguinage*.

Although many *béguinages* lost their enclosed aspect during the French period and the gates were removed, some still boast fine gates dating from the 17th century (Diest, Lierre, Herentals) or the early 19th century (Turnhout, the *Grand Béguinage* of Leuven, the *Petit Béguinage* of Gent).

Beguine houses are small single-storey brick buildings with a small enclosed garden. They date from a variety of periods and their style reflects the traditional urban architecture of four regions: the coastal region (French Flanders) in Brugge or Kortrijk; Brabant with local adaptations in Gent, Termonde, Antwerp, Diest, Mecheln, etc; the Campinoise region in Hoogstraten and Turnhout; and the Mosane in Saint-Trond and Tongeren. The community houses, often founded by benefactors for poor Beguines, stand out from the ensemble by virtue of their size and richer decoration. The house of the *Grande Dame* or Council, located near the church, is more representative in its dimensions, the arrangement of its facades and its interior design.

Of the buildings destined for charitable or economic purposes, the most representative examples are to be found at the *Grand Béguinage* of Leuven (infirmary, farm, and Table of the Holy Spirit, facing the church), at Tongeren (the infirmary with chapel and brew-house), and at Saint-Trond (the infirmary-farm ensemble with its monumental barn).

The churches figure among the main constructions of the *béguinages* and generally follow the main architectural currents and their regional interpretations, repeated with simplicity and sobriety and using local materials. They represent the most ancient element of the heritage of the *béguinages*, particularly at the *Grand Béguinage* of Leuven (church building began

in 1305), at Saint-Trond (latter half of the 13th century) and Diest (14th century).

The churches also bear witness to the damage and destruction of the 15th century in the form of partial reconstruction (Brugge) or new construction once the *béguinages* were transferred to the city (Church of Saint-Alexis and Catherine in Mecheln, a fine Baroque building by J Franquart and P Huyssens, dating from the beginning of the 17th century). They also illustrate the prosperity of the *béguinages* in the 17th and early 18th centuries, with the introduction of Baroque decor (Church of Saint-Jean-Baptiste in the *Grand Béguinage* of Leuven, Church of Sainte-Catherine in Diest, etc), or through new constructions such as the Church of Sainte-Marguerite in Lierre.

The Church of Sainte-Agnès in the *Béguinage* of Saint-Trond houses a series of major wall paintings (from around 1300 to the beginning of the 17th century), including pillars of the Beguines' choir, figures of holy women, and scenes from the life of Mary, which offer a particular illustration of the devotion practised by the Beguines. Other *béguinage* churches feature church furnishings (tombstones, pulpits, organs particularly, etc), mainly from the 17th and 18th centuries.

Also to be found are chapels (Chapel of Sainte-Godelive at the *Petit Béguinage* of Gent), calvaries (Turnhout), Stations of the Cross (Lierre), and niches for statues of patron saints of the house (Diest, etc), all of which bear witness to the devotion of the Beguines. Many of their sanctuaries, like the Grotto of Notre-Dame de Lourdes in Turnhout, are still places of worship.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Since the adoption of the National Law of 7 August 1931, which designates the *béguinages*, in whole or in part, as Protected Monuments, Sites, or Monuments and Sites, the Decree of the Flemish Government of 3 March 1976 (as modified by the Decree of 22 February 1995) establishes rules for the protection, maintenance, and restoration of the *béguinages* as urban or rural Monuments and/or Sites. Such decrees reflect a growing recognition of the value of the *béguinages* as ensembles. It should be noted that, for many *béguinages*, the protection, which was first confined to the church, has only been extended to the ensemble in the last thirty years.

The legal protection order sets forth the general conditions and any recommendations specific to each *béguinage* relating to conservation and maintenance (prohibition of demolition, alteration of the appearance or transformation of buildings, possibility of new construction as appropriate, indications about the nature of electrical installations, roadways, plantings, etc).

The 1976 Decree establishes a direct link with legislation pertaining to National Planning and Urban Development (26 March 1962), in that any application for a permit relating to a protected property must

be submitted to the Division of Monuments and Sites (*Division des Monuments et Sites*) for approval.

In addition, the Order of the Flemish Government dated 17 November 1993 sets out general regulations relating to the conservation and maintenance of urban monuments and sites. They concern both the exteriors and the interiors of protected properties.

The protection, conservation, and restoration of the *béguinages* is under the control of the Division of Monuments and Sites of the Flemish Community Ministry (Department of the Environment and Infrastructure, Administration of National Planning, Housing and Monuments and Sites).

All the *béguinages* are included in the sector plans required under the Law on National Planning and Urban Development, within Residential Zones, as Zones and Sites of special cultural, historical, and/or aesthetic interest (CHE Zones), whose main objective is the conservation and development of cultural heritage. Such CHE Zones do not fully cover the *Béguinages* at Leuven (*Grand Béguinage*), Diest, and Hoogstraten. The sector plans are currently under review, however, and will be added to in the case of these three *béguinages* and extended for those of Termonde, Mont-Saint-Amand-lez-Gand, Saint-Trond, and Turnhout. The circular of 23 August 1997 issued by the Department of Environment and Infrastructure stipulates that if a development programme in designated zones is likely to have an adverse impact on the value of the sites, the Division of Monuments and Sites must be consulted. Specific development plans for the municipalities concerned must comply with the definition of these Zones and Sites of special cultural, historical, and/or aesthetic interest, which constitute effective buffer zones.

Management

The *béguinages* are in public, private, or mixed ownership. The owners are either:

- a public social aid centre (OCMW), successor to the 18th century municipal commission of civil hospices. This municipal body is made up of members elected by the town council. Most of the *béguinages* belong to an OCMW;
- a non-profit-making association (ASBL), in the case of Termonde, Audenarde, Tirlemont, and Gent (*Petit Béguinage*). The *Béguinage* of Hoogstraten, which is owned by an OCMW, is on long lease to an ASBL;
- the city, which may own either the entire ensemble (Brugge, *Grand Béguinage* of Gent) or just part of the property (Tongeren, Saint-Trond, *Petit Béguinage* of Mecheln);
- an institution or administration such as the Catholic University of Leuven (*Grand Béguinage*), the Province of Limburg (Hasselt), the Church commissioners in the case of several *béguinage* buildings in Lierre, Mecheln (*Grand Béguinage*), and Hoogstraten;
- individual owners of houses in the *béguinages* of Lierre, Mecheln, Antwerp, Saint-Trond, and Termonde.

Owners are responsible for the management of the *béguinages*. Municipal policy towards the *béguinages* is crucial to their management, especially those which are owned by the municipal authority or by an OCMW.

The legal protection order requires the owner of a protected monument or building in an urban site to maintain the property in good repair by means of maintenance and conservation work. The Flemish Community Government makes maintenance and restoration grants to owners of protected monuments, for amounts determined according to the nature of the property (private or public). The maintenance grant covers a wide range of work, which goes beyond the basic concept of maintenance.

Restoration grants for large-scale work are particularly designed for associations and owners of monuments that are open to the public, such as the *béguinages*. Where buildings are not protected as monuments, the owners of certain *béguinages* (eg the OCMW in Diest) offer tenants the option of an interior renovation contract, under which tenants invest in renovation work in return for reduced rents. In addition, Government fiscal policy encourages the preservation of monuments and sites.

With the exception of Hasselt, the *béguinages* have retained their social welfare function (rental of houses), and many continue to house specialized institutions (day centres for the elderly, special schools, etc). The most spacious buildings in certain *béguinages* have been given over to new purposes (*béguinage* museum, exhibition hall, cultural centre, conference and seminar rooms, etc), but only the *Béguinage* of Hasselt is given over entirely to a single project, as a centre for art and culture.

The *béguinage* churches are for the most part open for worship: the Church at Saint-Trond houses a museum of religious art. Projects are under consideration for the use of the large buildings at several *béguinages*, including Tongeren and Mont-Saint-Amand-lez-Gand.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

When the first legal protection measures were introduced (1931), few of the *béguinages* were taken into consideration in their entirety (Kortrijk, Diest, Brugge). Elsewhere, the church alone, by virtue of its archaeological interest, benefited from restoration work, as in Saint-Trond or at the *Grand Béguinage* of Leuven. Buildings which were still serving a function were maintained in a satisfactory condition.

During the 1960s, many *béguinages* that were threatened with destruction and which did not as yet enjoy any overall legal protection were saved thanks to campaigns and preservation operations spearheaded by specialists, volunteers, and associations. Such was the case, in particular, of the *Grand Béguinage* of Leuven, purchased by the Catholic University of Leuven, which then put Professor Raymond Lemaire in charge of restoration.

Since the 1970s, when legal protection was gradually extended to all the *béguinages*, conservation and res-

toration work has been carried out on a more regular basis. The conservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of the *béguinages* has local implications. Major work has been and is carried out either on an *ad hoc* basis, as and when houses are vacated, or as part of larger-scale phased projects, each of which concerns a group of buildings. Houses recently restored or in the process of restoration bear witness to the care taken over both interiors and exteriors, integrating elements from different periods into the ensemble only after careful evaluation. Several proposals for the restoration of houses and churches (Diest, Tongeren, Mecheln, Hoogstraten) have been submitted to the Division of Monuments and Sites.

The schedule of priorities drawn up by the Division of Monuments and Sites in 1997 will provide extra resources for the conservation and development of the Flemish *béguinages*. It also provides for the setting up of a network of owners and managers of *béguinages* to share their experiences of managing such properties.

Authenticity

Despite the damage caused to the Flemish *béguinages* after their suppression in the 18th century, their authenticity is entirely satisfactory.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the properties in February 1998. ICOMOS also consulted a specialist at the University of Reading (UK).

Qualities

The Flemish *béguinages* proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List represent a unique cultural tradition born in the Middle Ages, that of the Beguines, women who embarked on a semi-religious life.

Although the Beguine movement developed throughout north-western Europe (what is now Belgium, Holland, northern France, the Rhine valley, and eastern England), the founding of the *béguinages*, large enclosed ensembles designed to meet the spiritual and material needs of the Beguine communities were confined to the Flemish regions.

Comparative analysis

Although traces remain of *béguinages* in other regions of Belgium (Church of Saint-Christophe in the *Béguinage* of Liège, the *Béguinage* Chapel in Mons, several houses in Enghien and Anderlecht, the church of the *Grand Béguinage* of Brussels), in France (a handful of houses in the *Béguinage* of Saint-Vaast in Cambrai), England (the Elm Hill houses in Norwich), and the *Béguinages* of Amsterdam and Breda in the Netherlands, the Flemish *béguinages* proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List constitute the most representative architectural ensembles associated with the Beguine movement.

ICOMOS comments

The State Party has proposed twenty-six *béguinages* or remains of *béguinages* for inscription on the World Heritage List. This group represents a very broad sample in terms of the history, typology, and state of preservation of the *béguinages*. While several of them have preserved their distinctive characteristics, others have lost them as a result of the vicissitudes of history.

While recognizing that a single *béguinage* would not be representative of the Beguine tradition and that the concept of outstanding universal value can only be applied to a group of *béguinages*, ICOMOS nonetheless has certain reservations concerning the proposed inscription of all 26 *béguinages*.

ICOMOS suggests that the proposed inscription should be limited to those *béguinages* that are most representative of the Beguine tradition, identified on the basis of their historic and architectural development and their state of preservation. They are the following:

- *City type*: Lierre, Diest, Tongeren, Kortrijk, *Grand Béguinage* of Mecheln, Mont-Saint-Amond-Lez-Gand.
- *Courtyard type*: Hoogstraten, Brugge (Bruges), Termonde, Turnhout, and Saint-Trond.
- *Mixed type*: *Grand Béguinage* of Leuven, *Petit Béguinage* of Gent.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

ICOMOS draws the attention of the State Party to the need to ensure common management procedures for the different owners and to draw up a development plan for the *Béguinage* of Tongeren. Traffic regulations should also be introduced into those *béguinages* which do not as yet have them, and care should be taken to locate projected parking areas outside the ensembles. ICOMOS also invites the State Party to continue its programme of action on behalf of all the Flemish *béguinages* under the 1997 schedule of priorities.

Brief description

The Beguines were women who entered into a life dedicated to God but without retiring from the world. In the 13th century they founded the *béguinages*, enclosed communities designed to meet their spiritual and material needs. The Flemish *béguinages* form architectural ensembles composed of houses, churches, ancillary buildings, and green spaces organized in a spatial conception of urban or rural origin, and are built in styles specific to the Flemish cultural region. They bear extraordinary witness to the cultural tradition of the Beguines that developed in north-western Europe in the Middle Ages.

Recommendation

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

Criterion ii: The Flemish *béguinages* demonstrate outstanding physical characteristics of urban and

rural planning and a combination of religious and traditional architecture in styles specific to the Flemish cultural region.

Criterion iii: The *béguinages* bear exceptional witness to the cultural tradition of independent religious women in north-western Europe in the Middle Ages.

Criterion iv: The *béguinages* constitute an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble associated with a religious movement characteristic of the Middle Ages associating both secular and conventual values.

ICOMOS, October 1998



**Les béguinages flamands / The Flemish *béguinages* :
Béguinage de Bruges, église Sainte Elisabeth / *Béguinage* of Bruges, St Elizabeth Church**



**Les béguinages flamands / The Flemish *béguinages* :
Grand béguinage de Louvain / *Grand béguinage* of Louvain**



Les béguinages flamands / The Flemish *béguinages* :
Béguinage de Courtrai / *Béguinage* of Courtrai



Les béguinages flamands / The Flemish *béguinages* :
Béguinage de Diest, porche monumental / *Béguinage* of Diest, monumental gate