

Ambohimanga (Madagascar)

No 950

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Royal Hill of Ambohimanga
<i>Location</i>	Municipality of Ambohimanga Rova, Province of Antananarivo Avaradrano
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Madagascar
<i>Date</i>	7 July 2000

Justification by State Party

The Royal Hill of Ambohimanga provides an exceptional witness to the civilization which developed on the Hautes Terres Malgaches between the 15th and 19th centuries, and to the cultural and spiritual traditions, the cult of kings and ancestors, which were closely associated there.

Criterion iii

The Royal Hill of Ambohimanga provides an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble (*Le Rova*) and an associated cultural landscape (wood and sacred lakes) illustrating significant phases in the history of the islands in the Indian Ocean between the 16th and 19th centuries.

Criterion iv

The countryside of the Royal Hill of Ambohimanga is associated with historic events (the historic site of the unification of Madagascar) and living beliefs (ancestor worship), giving it an exceptional universal value.

Criterion vi

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 *site*. In term of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, para 39, it is also a *cultural landscape*.

History and Description

History

The growth in Madagascar of a fragmented political structure based on local lords meant that, from the 15th century onwards, defensible hills were in demand for

the construction of *rova* or fortified royal enclosures (analogous to hillforts in western Europe during the 1st millennium BC). On the summits, woodland was kept for practical and spiritual reasons but the forest on lower ground was cleared to provide the economic base for such places to exist. Agricultural terraces were also constructed on the lower hill-slopes. In effect, the cultural landscape was in place by the 16th century. The only major change since then has been the removal of upland forest on the neighbouring heights to Ambohimanga during the French colonial period.

Ambohimanga itself originated in at least the 15th century and by the 18th century, particularly under Andriantsimitoviaminandriana (1740–45), had developed into a capital with defences and seven gates. Outer defences and seven more gates were added, probably before 1794 when the royal palace was moved to Antananarivo, leaving Ambohimanga as the royal burial place and religious capital. The existing defensive wall was built by Queen Ranavalona I (1828–61), with new gateways to north and south-west (c 1830). The palace *Fandriampahalemana* and the glass pavilion *Tranofitaratra* were added in 1871.

In March 1897 the mortal remains of royalty were transferred to Antananarivo by the French colonial authorities in a failed attempt to erase the holiness of the site and the nationalistic legitimacy attached to it. The royal tombs were demolished and military buildings erected in their stead for the garrison on the site. By 1904, all trace of them, in their turn, had been removed. The site continued to be used for religious purposes, particularly as a pilgrimage destination, throughout the 20th century, and remains an active holy place today.

Description

The Royal Hill of Ambohimanga consists of a royal city, a burial site (royal tombs), and a collection of sacred places (wood, spring, lake, public meeting place). It is associated with strong feelings of identity, emphasizing its sacred character, which continues into the present in popular recognition. It is a pilgrimage destination within Madagascar and internationally (Ivato international airport lies 10km to the west). In addition, it possesses an architectural quality in its groups of buildings and an ecological value in its natural ecosystems which conserve numerous species of indigenous plants. The site is inhabited by some 900 people, with about 2000 in the buffer zone.

The whole can be considered as an assemblage of ten *sous-ensembles*:

1. *The Hill*, rising to 1468m above the plain at an altitude of about 1300m, carries residual forest cover which masks numerous archaeological remains and shelters the royal city.
2. *The fortifications* protected the royal city in an arrangement of banks, ditches, and fourteen stone gateways. The outer seven were built in 1787; the inner seven, interspersed around a 2.5km circuit, date to the early 18th century. Doors were large, thick and up to 12 tonnes in weight – very much status symbols. Use of these gateways was carefully regulated.
3. *The fortified royal city (Le Rova)* originated in the 15th century and developed in the 17th and 18th centuries. Contained within an enclosure, it consists of a

coherent suite of buildings and provides a place for public functions. Called *Le Fidasiانا*, it was where sovereign and subject met in the shade of royal fig-trees. Royal pronouncements were made from a holy stone; nearby was a sacrificial stone. The space was ritually divided: the eastern sector was the sacred area, for ancestor worship and royal burial. Two holy rock-cut basins, filled with water by young virgins, played a significant role, particularly at the time of the annual royal "Fête du Bin." Royal corpses rested in a wooden mortuary house, *Tranomana*, en route to the royal tombs whence royalty, as ancestors, continued to exercise powers of protection and punishment over the living from inside a holy place enclosed by a wooden fence painted in white and red, the holy colours of Imerina royalty. There, eleven sovereigns rested in tombs surmounted by small wooden houses, *Tranamara*, until, in an abortive attempt to break the power of both the ancestors and the site itself, the French colonial authorities moved the regal mortal remains to Antananarivo in March 1897.

4. *The royal trees* are species of *Ficus* and *Dracaena sp.*, specifically reserved to royal cities, apparently since 1540.

5. *The seat of justice*, on a huge spherical, granite rock in the northern sector, is surrounded by a brick balustrade and shaded by a royal fig tree with stone steps surrounding its trunk. Here Andrianampoinimerina was proclaimed king and dispensed justice.

6. *Other holy places*, natural and constructed, exist both inside and outside the royal enclosure.

7. *The holy spring* is natural and always flowing, exiting through two orifices beneath a drystone cover. Its water is regarded as purifying.

8. *The holy lake of Amparihy* is artificial, its use being confined to royalty and ritual, such as the annual royal bath, princely circumcision, and the receipt of royal entrails. The bath is particularly symbolic, for then the king takes upon himself all the sins of the kingdom and, in ritually cleansing himself, both purifies his subjects and enables nature to regenerate.

9. *The sacred woods* consist of indigenous plants and, in a manner now absolutely rare on the *Hautes Terres*, represents in residual form the natural forest which once covered this and other hills. It has survived because it was always in the royal domain, managed under strict regulations. Attempts are in train to eradicate alien species introduced since the end of the 19th century.

10. *The agricultural terraces* developed during the 17th–18th centuries on the north and south of the hill, extending the royal power into economic matters and representing on the lower slopes of a holy hill agricultural production of rice, the staple food of the local population. The higher terraces are dry, the lower ones are in effect stepped rice paddy-fields.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The area of the proposed World Heritage site belongs largely to the State. Private individuals own some

agricultural plots, houses and gardens, and family tombs, a situation which has existed since the end of the 19th century.

In general, the legal provisions and regulations (details are provided in the nomination dossier) are adequate, but a special point is being made to the authorities to try to ensure that their implementation is both vigorous and rigorous, not least in the buffer zone. The sacred nature of the site affords it a strong guarantee of protection in some respects, for the hill is an object of popular veneration.

Management

Site management is provided by a Site Committee made up of national and local representatives, with a small permanent staff on site. Its responsibility is to manage according to the Management Plan, giving special emphasis to maintenance and preventive conservation, promotion, education, and publicity. It is advised by a Scientific Committee, particularly in respect of the maintenance of the site's integrity and authenticity. Another Committee is currently charged with revising the Management Plan, and will revise it periodically thereafter.

Locally, and day-to-day, the Municipality of Ambohimanga and the Museum Service (Directorate of Cultural Heritage) are responsible for the management and security of the site. Professionals from the Service visit the site regularly. Nine guards during the day and three at night provide on-site security. In total, 21 people are employed on site.

Finance is provided nationally via the Mayor's office, and from 60% of entrance fees received. Annual expenses are of the order of US\$113,000; gate receipts US\$20,000. External grants have been obtained for both restoration work and publicity.

An important role is played by non-governmental bodies (NGOs), notably MAMALOMASO and MIKOLO. Most of the restoration work, for example on the gates, stone-paved roads, and holy fountain, are undertaken by them with respect to appropriate standards of work. They are also involved in significant fund-raising, and play an important role in the dialogue between local inhabitants and other interested parties. With national and local authorities, universities and conservation professionals, and local people, the NGOs participate in the co-operative management of the site through the three Committees enumerated above.

Visitor numbers have risen from 34,000 to 41,000 (c 20%) between 1995 and 1999 (4% annually on average, though in fact there was a slump in 1996–98). Foreign tourists now number c 12 000 a year, having risen by c 30% since 1995 (again after a slump). The site can take c 1000 visitors per day or 120 per hour; in 1999 the average was 187 visitors daily, but much higher numbers were recorded on some days in May 1999. Some visitor wear-and-tear has been noted and preventive measures are being considered.

Pressures on the site appear to be minimal. There is concern about the gradual degradation of the countryside, but more obvious threats from development seem to be almost non-existent. A buffer zone is nevertheless proposed, primarily to keep the long-term threat of urbanization at bay. Fire is the main

day-to-day risk, and steps are in hand to improve on-site precautions.

Both the proposed site itself (59ha), and its buffer zone (425ha) are well defined and realistic.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Ambohimanga owes its state of preservation to the fact that it remained the religious capital and burial place of the royal family until 1896 and has continued to be revered and respected since. The removal of the mortal remains of royalty in 1897 was followed soon afterwards by the destruction of the tombs and the construction of temporary military buildings, removed by 1904. The place retained, however, as it continues to do, its feeling of sanctity, with a lawn now growing where the tombs once stood.

A programme of positive maintenance and restoration began in 1996 and has resulted in a satisfactory state of conservation. The nomination dossier details the state of each of the gateways, the defences, the footpaths, the royal city itself (including the palace and glass pavilion), the sacred places, and the natural resources (including the royal trees and sacred woods). While much work remains to be done, with a need above all for continuous maintenance, overall the situation is in hand. This was found to be the case by the ICOMOS mission.

Authenticity and integrity

The site possesses an exceptional universal value as a place representing the political aspirations of an indigenous people and representative of other iconographic places in the world where long-term historic, cultural, and spiritual values coalesce on the same spot. It is highly valued by the people of Madagascar and additionally, in the World Heritage context, provides an excellent example of one of those places in the world which have commanded peoples' veneration and respect through numerous vicissitudes over several centuries. Today it is apparently appreciated by an increasing number of visitors.

Ambohimanga has lost one of its principal functions, as a centre of political power, and it is no longer used for royal burial (but that is the result of the political process, and not Ambohimanga's fault); it has also lost the original royal tombs. There are, however, no inappropriate additions on site, and only one intrusive addition nearby (which is being dealt with). Overall, it is physically in good shape, with a reasonable degree of integrity despite the considerable range of its constituent parts.

It also possesses a high degree of authenticity. In this respect, its signal attribute is that, despite political moves to degrade the nature of the site, the hill has maintained its sacred nature and the respect of the people, somehow managing to transfer its qualities from the political context of a kingdom to that of a republic.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

It had been intended that a joint IUCN/ICOMOS mission should visit the site in January 2001 but, through force of circumstances, the mission was carried out almost completely by ICOMOS alone.

Qualities

The Royal Hill of Ambohimanga constitutes the most characteristic and most representative example of this type of site in Madagascar. It is an historic place, containing clear archaeological evidence of the former exercise of power and justice while marking the independence of the modern state of Madagascar. At the same time it is a holy place, recalling past kings and revisiting them as ancestors.

The Royal Hill of Ambohimanga bears a remarkable witness to, on the one hand, eastern Asiatic cultures through the cult of ancestors and in agricultural practices, notably rice-growing by irrigation and on terraces, and, on the other, to eastern and southern African cultures through the cult of royalty.

Comparative analysis

No other comparable property is inscribed on the World Heritage List and no study of such sites has yet been undertaken in a World Heritage context. However, the tombs of the Baganda Kings at Kasubi (Uganda), nominated for 2001, is a comparable site with, as at Ambohimanga, qualities based on hill-top location, royal residence, royal burial, ancestor worship, and a sanctity linked to group identity continuing into the present.

The nomination claims that the combination of material and spiritual in the context of a cultural landscape developed in Madagascar following the integration of cultural influences from eastern Asia and eastern Africa. This was effected in a particular geographical and biological context which allowed the inhabitants of the *Hautes Terres Centrales* of Madagascar to express a close relationship between the natural setting and the elements of power, between authority and the sacred. The expression took the form of the double cult of ancestors and royalty.

A number of other similar sites exist in Madagascar. Ambohimanga is the one which best preserves its integrity and spiritual significance. A visit to the site by an outsider brings to mind, in a completely different context, the atmosphere of the Shin-tō shrines of Isé in Japan.

Similar sites in Africa in general testify to a relationship between the natural heritage and sanctity in a context of mythology and cosmology embedded in spirituality. While such African holy sites are frequently associated with ancestor worship, they are not generally linked to local secular power. Their function and significance are therefore different to those of the royal sites of the *Hautes Terres Centrales* in Madagascar. (However, the site of Kasubi in Uganda, referred to above, would seem to be an exception to this generalization.)

ICOMOS comments and recommendations for future action

The Royal Hill of is a significant and well run site, highly regarded in Madagascar. ICOMOS wishes to make the following observations:

- i. While adequate statutory protection is in place on paper, it is crucial that its provisions be implemented and that the Management Plan be followed, monitored, and revised from time to time.
- ii. It is particularly important for as much support as is actually needed, in terms of both visible encouragement as well as financial and other resources, to be given to the managers and on-site personnel by the relevant authorities.
- iii. The particular threat on this site is from fire and so it is imperative that appropriate fire precautions measures, with an adequate water supply, are installed, implemented, and regularly tested.
- iv. Inscription, if implemented, is likely to encourage tourists to a site where, at the moment, visitor management is well controlled. The consequences of increased numbers, and probably in particular high numbers at predictable times, should be anticipated in terms of site management.

Brief description

The Royal Hill of Ambohimanga consists of a royal city, a royal burial site, and an ensemble of sacred places. It is associated with strong feelings of national identity, and has maintained its spiritual ambience and sacred character in both practice and popular respect over some five hundred years up to the present. It remains a place of worship and a place of pilgrimage from within and outside Madagascar.

Statement of Significance

The Royal Hill of Ambohimanga is of great significance to the people of Madagascar as a place vital in their political development yet at the same time of great religious meaning. As such, the Royal Hill of Ambohimanga is also of global significance as an excellent example of a place where, over centuries, so much of the common human experience comes to be focused in memory and aspiration, in ritual and prayer.

ICOMOS Recommendation

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

Criterion iii The Royal Hill of Ambohimanga is the most significant symbol of the cultural identity of the people of Madagascar.

Criterion iv The traditional design, materials, and layout of the Royal Hill of Ambohimanga are representative of the social and political structure of Malagasy society from at least the 16th century.

Criterion vi The Royal Hill of Ambohimanga is an exceptional example of a place where, over centuries, common human experience has been focused in memory, ritual, and prayer.

Bureau Recommendation

That the Royal Hill of Ambohimanga be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii, iv, and vi*.

ICOMOS, September 2001

COLLINE ROYALE D'AMBOHIMANGA ET SES ENVIRONS



LEGENDE

	Route principale		Village		Sol nu
	Autres routes		Forêt		Culture
	Piste		Bois		Rizière
	Sentier		Savane arborée		Lac
	Muraille		Savane herbeuse		Erosion
	Cours d'eau				
	Talus				
	Pente raide				

Echelle 1:10 000



Fond issu d'interprétation de photos aériennes à l'échelle de 1:10 000
Mission n° 228 réalisée en 1997
Conception et réalisation FTM
Mai 2000

Plan de localisation du bien proposé / Map showing the location of the nominated property