

Zanzibar (Tanzania)

No 173rev

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Stone Town of Zanzibar
<i>Location</i>	Zanzibar
<i>State Party</i>	United Republic of Tanzania
<i>Date</i>	18 June 1999

Justification by State Party

The Stone Town evolved through several millennia of maritime mercantile interaction. The surviving town is a physical reflection of testimony to this long-term interchange of human values within the coastal region of East Africa. It gives an authentic impression of the living Swahili culture and it is the best preserved example of its kind.

The layout, technology, and design of the Stone Town buildings, expertly blending imported and local ideas, materials, and techniques, makes the Stone Town an example of indigenous creativity.

Its continuous use as a residential and commercial town is a powerful medium for manifesting the memories of the slave trade and of explorers such as Vasco de Gama and David Livingstone. **Criteria iii, iv, and v**

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

Two major cultural traditions merge to form the Swahili civilization on the East African coast. A series of harbour towns developed under influences from the interior of Africa and from the lands across the Indian Ocean. There was a loose confederation of small coastal city states known as the *Zenj bar* (Black Empire) which operated in the 8th-10th centuries. The best preserved of these towns is Zanzibar, the name of which is derived from the Perso-Arabic word meaning "the coast of the blacks."

The earliest of these towns has been excavated at Unguja Ukuu on Zanzibar Island, where 5th century CE Roman and Sassanian-Islamic pottery has been found. Nearby is the

early 12th century mosque at Kizimkazi. These are among the many sites that have produced evidence of the existence in the 8th-15th centuries of an extensive and highly developed civilization that probably reached its apogee at Kilwa in the 14th century.

The Swahili economy was destabilized with the arrival of the Portuguese at the end of the 15th century. Following Vasco de Gama's visit in 1499 on his return from India, the Portuguese established a loose suzerainty over the Swahili coast as part of their trading activities. They were forced to settle it permanently when they were challenged by the Turks and later by rival European powers. A church and some merchants' houses were built at Zanzibar, where there had been a fishing village (Shangani) of simple wattle-and-daub houses thatched with palm leaves since the 10th century. They later added a massive fort on the sea front. However, Portuguese influence was limited, and came to an end at the end of the 17th century, when they were driven out of Fort Jesus at Mombasa.

The Portuguese trading role was gradually taken over by Omani Arabs, dealing in grain, dried fish, ivory, and slaves. The Omani ruler, Seyyid Said, made it the capital of his domain. There was a great increase in the number of buildings in stone, a technique ultimately deriving from the Shirazis of Persia via the great trading centre of Kilwa.

The slave trade did not assume large proportions until the later 18th century, when they were required in large numbers for the French sugar plantations in the islands of the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean. Dislocation of the slave trade as a result of wars between the English and the French in the early 19th century led to a substantial proportion of them being used in the clove plantations on Zanzibar Island.

The 19th century also saw a great expansion in trade in the Indian Ocean region. The ruling Islamic dynasty of Zanzibar and its merchants (Indian, Swahili, Arab, and Africans from the interior) became very rich and embellished the Stone Town with palaces and fine mansions. These were built in a variety of styles and traditions, which were amalgamated and homogenized into a characteristic Swahili architecture.

The earliest phase developed after the departure of the Portuguese, when the ruler, Mwinyi Mkuu Hasan, cleared the land on the peninsula beyond his palace. It was settled by Swahili immigrants from other parts of the coast and by Arabs from the Hadhramaut, who built residences in an indigenous style. The Minaret Mosque dates from this period.

In the 19th century this Swahili tradition was overwhelmed by new styles brought in by the floods of immigrants. It was at this time that the so-called "Swahili house" emerged, based on the earlier style but with imported details and techniques.

The Omanis introduced a completely different tradition, that of massively built multi-storey blocks built in mortared coral and with flat roofs. However, the wet climate of Zanzibar resulted in these roofs being quickly replaced by pitched roofs of corrugated iron or tiles. They were plain in appearance, the only striking external feature being the elaborately carved wooden doors. By contrast, the interiors were richly decorated and furnished.

The third architectural component came from India. The Indian traders began by buying Omani houses and adding

wide verandahs, but by the latter half of the 19th century they were constructing elaborately decorated houses reminiscent of the Gujarati *haveli*. However, the characteristic Indian house had a shop on the street frontage, with living quarters in the rear. As the owners became more affluent, they often added a second storey, the residential section being entirely on the upper floor and the lower confined to commercial activities.

Modern urban development may be deemed to have begun during the reign of Sultan Barghash (1870-88). He had been impressed by the towns of India during his exile there in 1860 and those of Europe in 1875, and he sought to emulate them. His most notable contribution to the architecture of the Stone Town was the House of Wonders, but his greatest legacy was the provision of piped water to the town.

The final phase of architectural development came with the arrival of the British in 1890, when Zanzibar became a British protectorate. They imported their colonial architecture but, under the influence of the architect John Sinclair, introduced a number of features derived from the Islamic architecture of Istanbul and Morocco. The British introduced strict building regulations and expanded the public services. Urban planning measures were promulgated from the 1920s onwards.

The last quarter of the 19th century saw increased European missionary activity, resulting in the construction of Anglican and Roman Catholic cathedrals, in the Gothic and Romanesque styles respectively. The Anglican cathedral was inspired by David Livingstone and built on the site of the last slave market, the slave trade having been brought to an end by the British.

The Arab ascendancy came to an end with the 1964 revolution and the creation of the United Republic of Tanzania. It led to many profound social and economic changes. Many of the wealthiest Arab and Indian merchants and craftsmen left the country, abandoning their fine houses and commercial buildings. Immigrants from rural areas and the neighbouring island of Pemba were settled by the government in these buildings, which deteriorated as a result of lack of maintenance. New construction in the Stone Town came to an end in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when development was concentrated in the expansion areas. In the 1980s building began again, introducing contemporary styles and materials that were out of harmony with the historic fabric. Only since the creation of the Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority in 1985 has any form of coordination of building been exercised.

Description

The Stone Town is located on a triangular promontory jutting out into the Indian Ocean about halfway down the western side of Unguja island, the main island of the Zanzibar archipelago. The Stone Town Conservation Area, which is nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List, consists of the built-up streets of the Stone Town and the open areas along its eastern border together with the older part of Darjani Street, covers 125ha .

Of the properties in the Stone Town 60% are commercial and residential and the remainder religious and public buildings (schools, markets, hospitals, etc). The largest class of traditional structures (32%) is that of shop-front buildings derived from Indian models. A further 25% are derived from Arab models. The remainder are either “traditional

unclassified,” where the construction technique is traditional but the architectural origins are unclear, and “contemporary,” built during the past thirty years and not conforming with the traditional fabric of the Stone Town.

The historical evolution of the Stone Town is illustrated by the street pattern. This is one of narrow winding streets resulting from unplanned building of houses and shops. There are few public open spaces, since many of the houses have their own enclosed spaces.

The principal construction material is coralline ragstone set in a thick lime mortar and then plastered and lime-washed. The vernacular architecture is preponderantly of two-storey buildings with long narrow rooms disposed round an open courtyard, reached through a narrow corridor. The dimensions of buildings and rooms are determined by the length of the locally grown *boritis*, the mangrove poles used to support the massive stone ceilings; these are generally 2.5-3m long.

The following are among the most important monuments in the Stone Town.

- The Old Fort

The plan of the original fort, built in the 18th century on the site of a Portuguese church, was an irregular quadrilateral with square gateways and towers (only four of which survive) linked by crenellated walls. It has recently been renovated and is now a cultural centre.

- The House of Wonders

The House of Wonders (*Beit al Ajaib*) was built by Sultan Barghash in 1883 for ceremonial use to the design of a British engineer. It is unique in East Africa for its size and dominates the sea-front. It contains many unique architectural features; the decorated verandah and other rooms are fitted with fretted cedar and teak panelling and the carved doors are covered with gilded texts from the Koran. It became a government office and it is now houses the Museum of History and Swahili Culture. Its present state of conservation is poor.

- The Old Dispensary

The design of this former hospital, built by a wealthy Ismaili business to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the British Queen Victoria in 1887, is Anglo-Indian. The centre-piece of this elaborate structure is its projecting double balcony with carved uprights and tracery barge-boards. It has been restored and is now the Zanzibar Cultural Centre.

- St Joseph’s Roman Catholic Cathedral

The cathedral was built in 1896, in French Neo-Romanesque style, to the plans of the architect of Notre-Dame de Marseille. It is cruciform in plan with basilican apse, octagonal dome, nave pierced by clerestory lights, and two lofty towers at the west end.

- Christ Church Anglican Cathedral

The Anglican cathedral is in part a monument commemorating the abolition of the slave trade in the Sultan’s dominions. The foundation stone was laid in 1873 and it was consecrated in 1903, named after Canterbury Cathedral. It is basilican in plan with an unusual combination of Perpendicular Gothic and Islamic details.

- The Tippu Tip House

The residence of the notorious slave trader from which it takes its name, this is a fine example of the vernacular Arab town house. Its noteworthy features include the steps in black and white marble and the fine carved door.

- Malindi Bamnara Mosque

This Sunni mosque was built around 1831 by Mohammed Abdul-Qadir el-Mansabi, whose remains are buried in front of the *mihrab*. It is one of the few mosques in Zanzibar with a minaret, decorated with a double chevron pattern. The minaret is thought to be considerably older than the mosque itself.

- Jamat Khan

The central feature of this imposing architectural work, built in 1907 for the Ismaili sect, is its great hall. The ceiling is supported by massive stone pillars with exquisite carved capitals. It is in a poor state of conservation.

- The Royal Cemetery

In the royal cemetery adjoining the Beit el Sahil Palace there is a half-finished tomb with delicately fluted columns, begun by Seyyid Majid during his Sultanate (1856-70). Work was suspended following objections from the Ibadhi sect, to which the royal house belongs. It contains the tombs of a number of members of the royal house.

- The Persian Baths

There are two sets of Persian baths in the Stone Town. The most elaborate are the Hamamni baths, built during the Sultanate of Seyyid Barghash (1870-88).

Management and Protection

Legal status

The protection of cultural property in Zanzibar is covered by the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, which dates from 1948, during the British Protectorate. However, this applies only to individual "gazetted" monuments and sites. The Stone Town and its surroundings were designated a Conservation Area by the Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority Act 1994. This was rendered possible by the powers given to the Minister of Local Government under the Town and Country Planning Act 1955 to appoint planning authorities for specific planning areas.

Since it forms part of the Zanzibar Municipality, the Stone Town is covered by the general local authority and land tenure legislation.

Management

The properties that make up this nomination of the Stone Town are owned by a variety of individuals and organizations, both public and private. A number of public buildings belong to the Ministry of Water, Construction, Energy, Lands and Museums. The port and its associated buildings are owned by the Zanzibar Ports Authority. The Zanzibar Municipal Council is the owner of all designated open and public spaces, the market, and the sewerage and drainage system. Some buildings, mainly mosques, cemeteries, and some commercial and private buildings are

in the custody of the Waqf and Trust Commission, an Islamic endowment.

The Stone Town Conservation Plan was formulated between 1992 and 1994 and became operational with the implementation of the 1994 Act. There is an overall Zanzibar Municipality Land Use Plan which came into effect in 1985. The whole Zanzibar Municipality is divided into zones, one of which is the Stone Town, for which conservation is strongly advocated, without going into detail. A comprehensive Zanzibar Tourism Plan is currently being prepared, which will take account of the special needs of the Stone Town among other tourist centres in Zanzibar.

The Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority (STCDA) has a coordinating and supervisory role in respect of the conservation and maintenance of all the properties. It deals directly with private owners, but the ministries and the Waqf and Trust Commission as government bodies are expected to carry out works in conformity with the conservation plan.

The historic area is divided into several zones, each with an inspector, who is charged with handling matters relating to all the properties, whether public or private, in that zone at every stage from project application to implementation.

So far as gazetted monuments are concerned, responsibility for monitoring is the responsibility of the Department of Archives, Monuments and Museums. Authorization of any interventions relating to land development and registration is the responsibility of the Commission for Lands and Environment, which acts on the recommendations of the STCDA.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Following the 1964 revolution and the emigration of the owners of many of the most important historical buildings and monuments, little, if any, conservation took place. As a result many are in a poor state of conservation. The STCDA was established to correct this lamentable situation. A certain amount of restoration work has been possible since that time, funded from the sale of government-owned properties and a UNDP grant programme which operated between 1989 and 1992.

However, the STCDA is largely dependent upon its own fund-raising activities to further the work. There has been support from bodies such as the Aga Khan Trust for specific properties, but the funding is inadequate for the tasks in hand. It is also confronted with strong commercial development pressures, which are having an adverse impact on the open spaces and on the general historic urban fabric.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the historic ensemble is largely intact, preserving the historic urban fabric and townscape and many historic public and private buildings. Traditional materials and construction techniques are still being employed to a large extent, though there is growing competition from modern materials, designs, and techniques.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the Stone Town in January 2000.

Qualities

The Stone Town of Zanzibar is an outstanding example of a Swahili trading town. This type of town developed on the coast of East Africa under Arab, Indian, and European influences, but retained its indigenous elements, to form an urban cultural unit unique to this region.

Comparative analysis

A number of coastal towns developed from the *Zenj bar* and flourished as a result of the intensive trade that built up under Portuguese and Omani rule. Some of these have survived, either as modern ports or in ruins, such as Mombasa, Kilwa, Lamu, and Bagamoyo. However, none of these can be compared directly with Zanzibar, which has retained a higher proportion of its historic buildings than any of the others and still has an important administrative and economic function.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

ICOMOS is concerned that the somewhat large number of “players” involved in the management and conservation of the Stone Town means that there are ambiguities and duplications of responsibility. As a result some developments that are incompatible with the historic quality of the Stone Town have occurred in recent years. It feels that these may increase under the increasing development pressure being exerted on Zanzibar at the present time.

In theory the coordinating and supervisory role of the STCDA should prevent such abuses. However, its notional overriding powers have largely been neglected. It is essential that it should be recognized as the sole executing agency, with appropriate powers, financial support, and professional staffing. It is suggested that the Attorney General should convene a meeting of all the stakeholders in order to clarify this situation and establish effective lines of communication and executive responsibility.

It is not necessary, in the opinion of ICOMOS, for inscription of the Stone Town on the World Heritage List to await the completion of this action. It suggests, however, that in inscribing the property the World Heritage Committee should require the State Party to report on progress within one or two years.

ICOMOS further suggests that the Tanzanian authorities should be invited to study other comparable projects which have achieved success. It has in mind in particular the work of the Central Cultural Fund in Sri Lanka, which worked on two historic towns (Galle and Kandy) where similar situations to that in the Stone Town had developed in the post-colonial period.

Whilst ICOMOS recognizes the significance of the Stone Town as the best and most complete example of the Swahili coastal trading town, it feels that there are good reasons, in the light of the Global Strategy, for a comparative study to be carried out on all the towns of that group, including Lamu, Mombasa, Mogadishu, and Kilwa in particular.

Brief description

The Stone Town of Zanzibar is a fine example of the Swahili coastal trading towns of East Africa. It retains its urban fabric and townscape virtually intact and contains many fine buildings that reflect its particular culture, which has brought together and homogenized disparate elements of the cultures of Africa, Arabia, India, and Europe over more than a millennium.

Recommendation

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

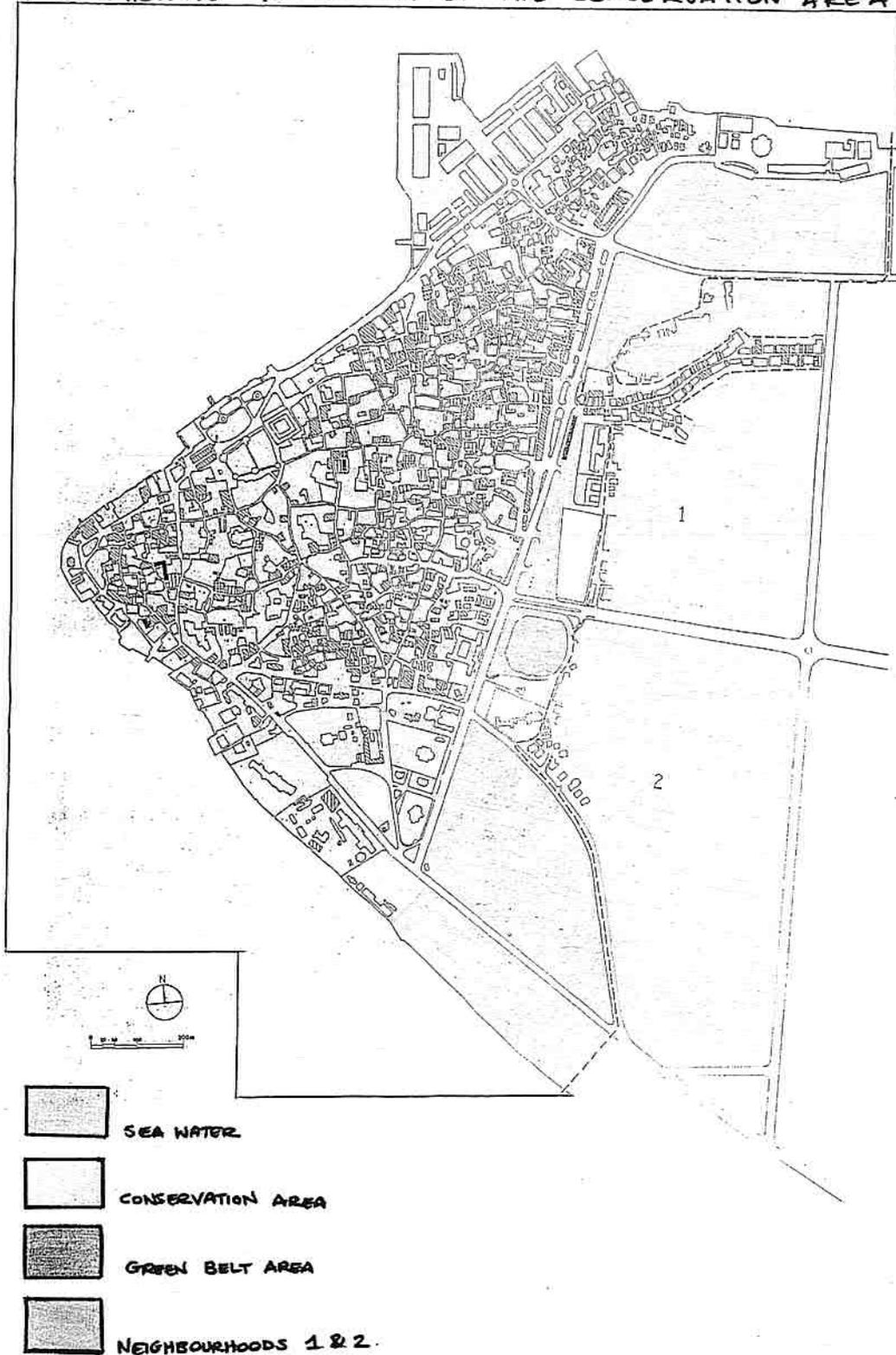
Criterion ii The Stone Town of Zanzibar is an outstanding material manifestation of cultural fusion and harmonization.

Criterion iii For many centuries there was intense seaborne trading activity between Asia and Africa, and this is illustrated in an exceptional manner by the architecture and urban structure of the Stone Town.

Criterion vi Zanzibar has great symbolic importance in the suppression of slavery, since it was one of the main slave-trading ports in East Africa and also the base from which its opponents such as David Livingstone conducted their campaign.

ICOMOS, September 2000

MAP SHOWING THE EXTENT OF THE CONSERVATION AREA



Plan indiquant la zone proposée pour inscription et la zone tampon /
Map showing nominated area and buffer zone