WORLD HERITAGE LIST  

N° 378

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination: Mudejar Architecture of Teruel
Location: Province of Teruel
State Party: Spain
Date: December 30, 1985

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion IV.

C) JUSTIFICATION

Teruel, which was captured in 1171 by Alfonso II, the Wise, king of Aragon, was one of the bridgeheads of the Reconquest of the Levante region. For the repoblación of the new city, which was granted a charter of freedom in 1176, efforts were made to retain the former social and religious balance, though a certain preference was given to the Christian majority. Though in 1196 mention was made of nine parishes, we know that the Moors remained in the city for a long time (the last private mosque disappeared in 1502) and the Jewish community prospered for a considerable period. Moreover, it was the massacre and expulsion of these Sephardic Jews in 1486 which brought on the decadence of Teruel.

Within this special historical context Mudejar art came into being in Teruel, as in Toledo, Zaragoza and many other cities. This art form drew its substance from both the Western tradition and the Eastern Islamic tradition, itself transformed by the artistic accomplishments in the Maghreb and the Emirate of Cordoba.

The Spanish government has nominated five properties for inscription: the Mudejar towers of San Pedro, the Cathedral, San Salvador and San Martin and the painted ceiling of the Cathedral. The Teruel towers together form a coherent and evolutionary ensemble which is truly characteristic of Mudejar art on the morrow of the Reconquista. The architects of the Christian churches copied the structure and decoration of Almohada minarets, though giving them new functions right from the very start.
Initially limited to three levels, the towers of San Pedro and the Cathedral of Santa Maria de Mediavilla, both of which seem to have been built before 1258, are watchtowers, defence structures and part of the urban landscape. They rise up at the west end of the nave and at the ground floor level are crossed by vaults on a north-south axis. They were doubtlessly used as campaniles from the beginning.

These same functional characteristics can be found in the lateral towers of the Church of San Salvador, which was built ca. 1277, and especially San Martin, built prior to 1315-1316 on the same axis as the nave to the west of the church. This tower too has a vaulted passage in the north-west direction.

The extremely varied decoration of the four towers consists of different arrangements of ceramic elements, raised interlacing and arcatures which crisscross. This decoration consists of a wealth of shapes taken from Islamic art and in some cases is found on other parts of the churches, such as the apse of the Church of San Pedro.

The second property contained in the Spanish government's nomination for inclusion, the "artesonado" ceiling of the Cathedral, ca. 1300, is another eminent example of Mudejar art. The technique of the coffered ceiling and the principle of decorative interlacings were taken from Moslem tradition. On the other hand, the iconography consisting of figurative elements, figures and monsters painted in bright colours on panels or carved into the carpentry is part of the Gothic repertory and in terms of style does not differ from creations of its time in Europe.

After examining the Spanish government's nomination, ICOMOS had expressed some minor reservations regarding this proposal:

1) Could not the city of Zaragoza offer as full a panorama of Mudejar art with the Aljafería Palace, the Seo and the Tower of the church of San Pablo?

2) As it stood, the nomination was either too broad (it could have been limited to the towers, which form an outstanding array), or too restrictive. ICOMOS wished to see it expanded to include the following:
   - Tower and apse of the Church of San Pedro
   - Tower and "artesonado" ceiling of the Cathedral
   - Tower of San Salvador
   - Tower of San Martin;

3) The Teruel towers, and especially that of San Pedro, were seriously damaged during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and are now in a precarious state of preservation. Some of them are the object of restoration projects whose details are lacking in the nomination file.
Since the Spanish government agreed to extend the nomination to include the apse of the Church of San Pedro (letter of 16 May 1986), ICOMOS expresses a favourable opinion for inclusion of this property on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion IV.

ICOMOS, October 1986.
TERUEL: TORRE DE SAN MARTÍN. — ALZADO.
TERUEL : plafond peint de la Cathédrale