

# ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES  
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES  
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS  
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

N° 451

## A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : The historic city of Galle and its fortifications

Location : Southern province

State Party : Sri Lanka

Date : December 31, 1986

## B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

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

## C) JUSTIFICATION

The bay of Galle lies off the southwest coast of Sri Lanka, sheltered by a rocky peninsula. Mentioned as early as 545 in the cosmography of Cosmas Indicopleustes, it is one of the most ancient "ports of call of the Levant."

When Ibn Batuta landed there in 1344, it was the principal port of Ceylon. Portuguese navigators settled there in 1505, two years before settling in Colombo. It seems that they preferred Colombo at first. However, later, in 1588, after being beseiged there by King Sitawaka, they decided to withdraw to Galle. At the end of the 16th century they hastily constructed a rampart and three bastions to defend the peninsula on the northern landside. The seaward side was considered invulnerable and was not fortified.

Few vestiges subsist from this phase of Portuguese occupation during which, in particular, a Franciscan chapel was built in 1543. When the fortified town fell into the hands of the Dutch in 1640, they decided to replace the precarious Portuguese defenses constituted partially of palisades and earth banks. They encircled the whole of the peninsula with a bastioned stone wall so as to render it impregnable against the English, French, Danish, Spanish and Portuguese fleets vying with Holland for the supremacy of the sea.

It is this fortified city built by the Dutch which exists today with but few changes. It has an area of 52 hectares inside the walls defended by 14 bastions. The majority of the curtain walls were built in 1663. The northern fortified gate, protected by a

drawbridge and a ditch, bears the date 1669. Much of the city, laid out on a regular grid pattern adapted to the configuration of the terrain (north-south peripheral streets are parallel to the ramparts and not to the central traffic axes), dates from this period.

During the 18th century, protected by a sea wall finished in 1729 the city reached full development. It housed 500 families, and a large number of public administrations, trade establishments and warehouses were located there. A Protestant, baroque-style church, the oldest in Sri Lanka, was constructed in 1775 for the European colonists and a few Christian converts from plans drawn up by Abraham Anthonisz. However, Galle remained essentially a stronghold. In the layout of the city the Commandant's residence, the arsenal and the powder house were prominent features. The forge, carpentry and rope-making workshops, the naval guardhouse, and barracks rounded out a system that closely linked prosperous trade to military security.

The fort of Galle was handed over to the English only on 23 February 1796, one week after the surrender of Colombo. As a British protectorate, Galle remained the administrative centre of the south of Ceylon. A number of unfortunate modifications were then made: ditches filled in, new blockhouses added, a gate put in between the Moon bastion and the Sun bastion, a lighthouse installed on the Utrecht bastion, and a tower erected for the jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1883. Other work was undertaken during the Second World War in order to restore the defensive function of the fortifications.

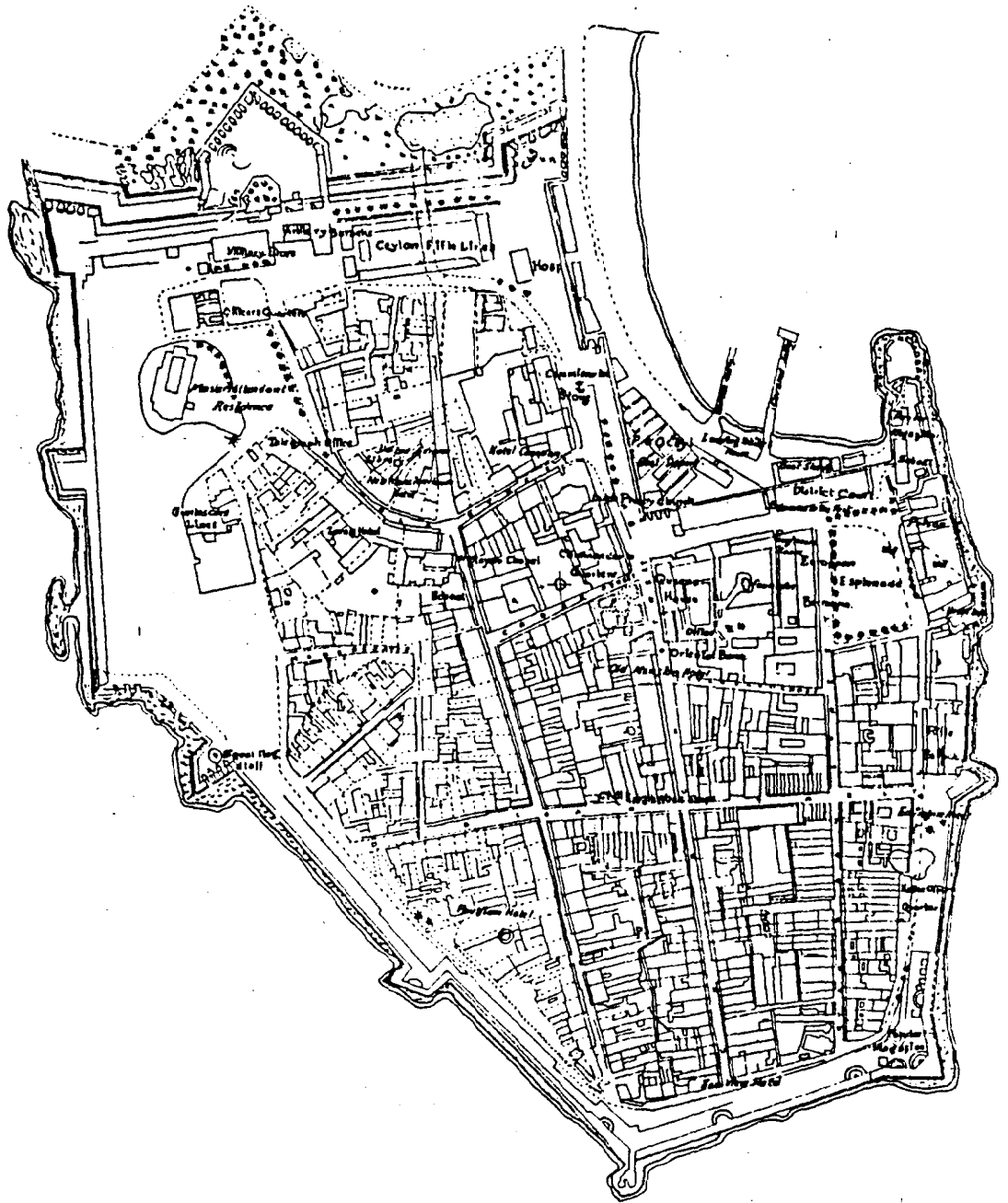
Taken together these alterations, few in number, as can be seen from the above, have not seriously modified the original city plan. Galle remains the best example of a fortified city built by Europeans in South and Southeast Asia.

ICOMOS recommends the inclusion of this cultural property on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion IV.

- **Criterion IV.** Galle provides an outstanding example of an urban ensemble which illustrates the interaction of European architecture and South Asian traditions from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Among the characteristics which make this an urban group of exceptional value is the original sewer system from the 17th century, flushed with sea water controlled by a pumping station formerly activated by a windmill on the Triton bastion.

However, the most salient fact is the use of European models adapted by local manpower to the geological, climatic, historic and cultural conditions of Sri Lanka. In the structure of the ramparts, coral is frequently used along with granite. In the ground layout all the measures of length, width and height conform to the regional metrology. The wide streets, planted with grass and shaded by suriyas, are lined with houses, each with its own garden and an open verandah supported by columns -another sign of the acculturation of an architecture which is European only in its basic design.

ICOMOS, July 1988



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