

## WORLD HERITAGE LIST

### Paquimé (Mexico)

No 560rev

#### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The archaeological zone of Paquimé, Casas Grandes
<i>Location</i>	Municipality of Casas Grandes, State of Chihuahua
<i>State Party</i>	Mexico
<i>Date</i>	30 October 1989

#### Justification by State Party

The excavated areas of Paquimé that are visible form only a small part of this urban complex. They have been carefully conserved and protected as exceptional archaeological remains without any changes to their appearance and avoiding any reconstruction work. By maintaining its high level of authenticity, the site thus also constitutes a major archaeological reserve.

Paquimé is the centre and largest of a series of sites, such as Quarenta Casas, Cueva de la Olla, Las Vigas-Babicora, and Maedra in north-western Chihuahua and Tres Rios and Sahuaripa in north-eastern Sonora, because of its influence on the development of architecture and human settlement in a vast area of Mexico and in Arizona and New Mexico in the southern part of the United States of America.

#### Criterion ii

Paquimé is not merely the main archaeological site of the Casas Grandes Culture that developed between 700 and 1450, it also represents exceptional testimony to the organization of space at the level of architecture and human settlement in a vast area known as "Oasis America."

#### Criteria iii and iv

Characteristic elements are the complex system for controlling, distributing, and conserving water reserves, and the use of small T-shaped doors for communication between interior spaces that are small and organized in a complex manner, sometimes with cruciform or Z-shaped plans and often rising to two or three storeys.

#### Criteria iii and iv

By virtue of the character of its building material and the system of construction used, this exceptional example of a prehispanic settlement, with its adobe architecture, is fragile and at risk from irreversible degradation without permanent conservation measures.

#### Criterion v

#### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

#### History and Description

##### History

The so-called Pueblo Culture of the south-west of the United States of America, based on agriculture, spread slowly southwards during the 1st millennium AD. A village of pit houses was founded at the site of Casas Grandes, in north-western Chihuahua, during the 8th century by Mogollon people from New Mexico. It developed slowly until the mid 12th century, when it underwent a dramatic expansion and cultural shift.

The pit dwellings were replaced by more elaborate above-ground adobe structures on a complex layout. The presence of features such as platform mounds, ball-courts, a sophisticated water-distribution system, and specialized storage buildings for exotic products such as macaws and turkeys, shell and copper artefacts, and agave indicates influence from the more advanced civilizations of Mesoamerica. There is still uncertainty among archaeologists as to whether this represents an invasion from the south or an indigenous expansion to handle a greatly increased volume of trade.

Paquimé became a major mercantile centre, linked with a large number of smaller settlements around it. It has been estimated that the population during its peak period of prosperity, in the 14th and early 15th centuries, was of the order of 10,000, making it one of the largest proto-urban agglomerations in northern America.

Following the Spanish conquest of Mexico a new social and economic structure on the European model was imposed upon the region, in which Paquimé played no part. It rapidly declined, and early Spanish explorers reported only small farming communities living in north-western Chihuahua. The final break-up came in the later 17th century, when intensive Spanish colonization of the area resulted in the displacement of the surviving inhabitants.

##### Description

The archaeological site is located at the foot of the Sierra Madre Occidental range near the headwaters of the Casas Grandes river.

It covers 36ha, of which only about 20% has been excavated. It is estimated that it contains the remains of at least 2000 rooms, grouped in clusters of living rooms, workshops, and stores, with patios. The predominant building material is unfired clay (adobe), but stone is used for specific purposes, such as the lining of pits, a technique believed to have been imported from central Mexico.

Typical of these is the House of the Ovens, a block made up of a single-storey room and four stone-lined pits, with a mound of burnt rocks alongside. It forms part of a larger complex consisting of nine rooms and two small plazas. The pits are thought to have been

used for baking agave or sotol, using heated stones which were discarded afterwards.

The House of the Serpent consisted originally of 24 single-storey rooms, two two-storey rooms, three hall-ways, and three plazas. It was later extended and adapted so as to provide enlarged facilities for raising macaws and turkeys, which seems to have been its primary function. A similar sequence can be observed in the House of the Macaws, so named because 122 birds were found buried beneath its floors.

The Mound of the Cross, close to the House of the Ovens, consists of five low stone-lined and earth-filled mounds. The central one mound is in the shape of an uneven cross, the arms of which roughly correspond with the cardinal points, which suggests that it played a role in celebrations to mark the equinoxes and solstices. The function of the Mound of the Offerings is less clear. It consists of a multilevel structure of rammed rubble, a puddled adobe precinct, and a ramp, leading to one of the water-storage cisterns. The central portion contains seven rooms containing altar stones, statues, and secondary burials. The Mound of the Bird takes its name from its outline, which resembles a headless bird facing east. No structures were found within it.

Two ball-courts have been excavated, with characteristic I-shaped plans derived from Mesoamerica. No 1, which survives virtually intact, also has field structures on three of its sides, again typical of the Late Classic and Early Post-Classic Periods of central Mexico.

The water system consists of reservoirs linked by channels which distributed water to each of the room-blocks. The House of the Wells takes its name from the large storage cistern (now backfilled for reasons of safety) in one of its plazas that was fed from the common network. The sophistication of the system is shown by the presence of silting ponds at the entrance of each reservoir.

## **Management and Protection**

### *Legal status*

The entire archaeological area is protected under the 1972 Federal Law on Historic, Archaeological and Artistic Monuments and Zones. This establishes an overriding public ownership of all designated monuments and sites, even when these are located on privately owned land. The nominated property constitutes the Archaeological Monuments Zone of Paquimé, created by Presidential Decree on 2 December 1992, and covering a total surface area of over 146ha. No interventions of any kind may be made without the authorization of the National Institute for Anthropology and History (INAH).

Most of the nominated area is in the direct ownership of the Federal Government. A sector in the south-west of the Monuments Zone is in private ownership but subject to the provisions of the 1972 Act.

### *Management*

The Archaeological Zone is managed by the Regional Centre of INAH, based at Chihuahua, with the close collaboration of the Ministry of Social Development

(SEDESOL), the Government of the State of Chihuahua, and the Municipality of Casas Grandes in matters pertaining to planning regulations.

A multidisciplinary group convened by INAH, with representatives at Federal, State, and Municipality level covering conservation, education, ecology, economy, and tourism, and with the collaboration of the US National Park Service, was responsible for the preparation of a comprehensive Strategic Plan which forms the basis for the future management of the site.

Special attention has been given to the presentation of the site to the general public in recent years. The site Museum was opened in 1995, providing interpretive and educational material for visitors. The on-site signage and paths have also been the subject of considerable improvement and extension.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

Protection and study of the site began on a modest scale in the 1920s. Modest measures of conservation were applied on a systematic basis in the 1930s. Major excavation projects have been carried out in 1959-61 by Di Peso (who published the first major scientific study of Paquimé) and then until 1973 by Contreras. Annual excavations by INAH continued until 1992, when it became one of the twelve archaeological sites chosen as the subjects of special projects with major funding.

Conservation interventions at Paquimé have traditionally been kept to the minimum consistent with the fragility of the material involved, adobe. During the past three years special attention has been given to the following aspects of conservation: study and analysis of clays; alternative methods of covering and reburial of the most vulnerable structures; creation of a research centre in a 19th century historic building in the neighbouring village; holding an annual international seminar on the conservation of mud-brick architecture; and, in particular, the preparation of the Strategic Plan (see above).

### *Authenticity*

As an excavated archaeological site, where no reconstruction has taken place, Paquimé may be considered to be completely authentic.

## **Evaluation**

### *Action by ICOMOS*

Paquimé was first visited by an ICOMOS expert mission in 1992, in the course of a comparative study on Pueblo Culture sites in Mexico and the USA. An expert mission visited the site again in January 1997.

### *Qualities and comparative analysis*

At the time of the 1992 comparative study, the ICOMOS mission was looking in particular into the possibility of combining this nomination (deferred by the Bureau at its meeting in 1990 pending the results of a comparative study of property of this type

located in Mexico and the United States) with that of Taos Pueblo. In its report the mission recommended that a joint inscription was not appropriate. The Casas Grandes Culture was identified as distinct from that of the Classic Pueblo sites (Mesa Verde and Chaco Canyon, already inscribed on the List) and that of the “living” sites best represented by Taos (which was inscribed on the List by the Committee at its 1992 meeting).

There is a very strong case for the inscription of Paquimé, since it is an extensive and remarkably well preserved (by virtue of the fact that only a small part has been excavated) site that best illustrates this third component of the Pueblo Culture. It is of particular interest in that it forms the cultural and economic link between this indigenous cultural evolution and the more advanced civilizations of Mesoamerica.

The 1992 ICOMOS mission report reserved judgement on the case for inscribing Paquimé to await more information on other sites in the region. Since that time more work has been carried out, and ICOMOS has had the opportunity for a more intensive survey of the existing literature. This makes it clear that Paquimé was without doubt the largest and most important settlement of the period in the region, of which it formed the political and economic “capital.”

#### **Brief description**

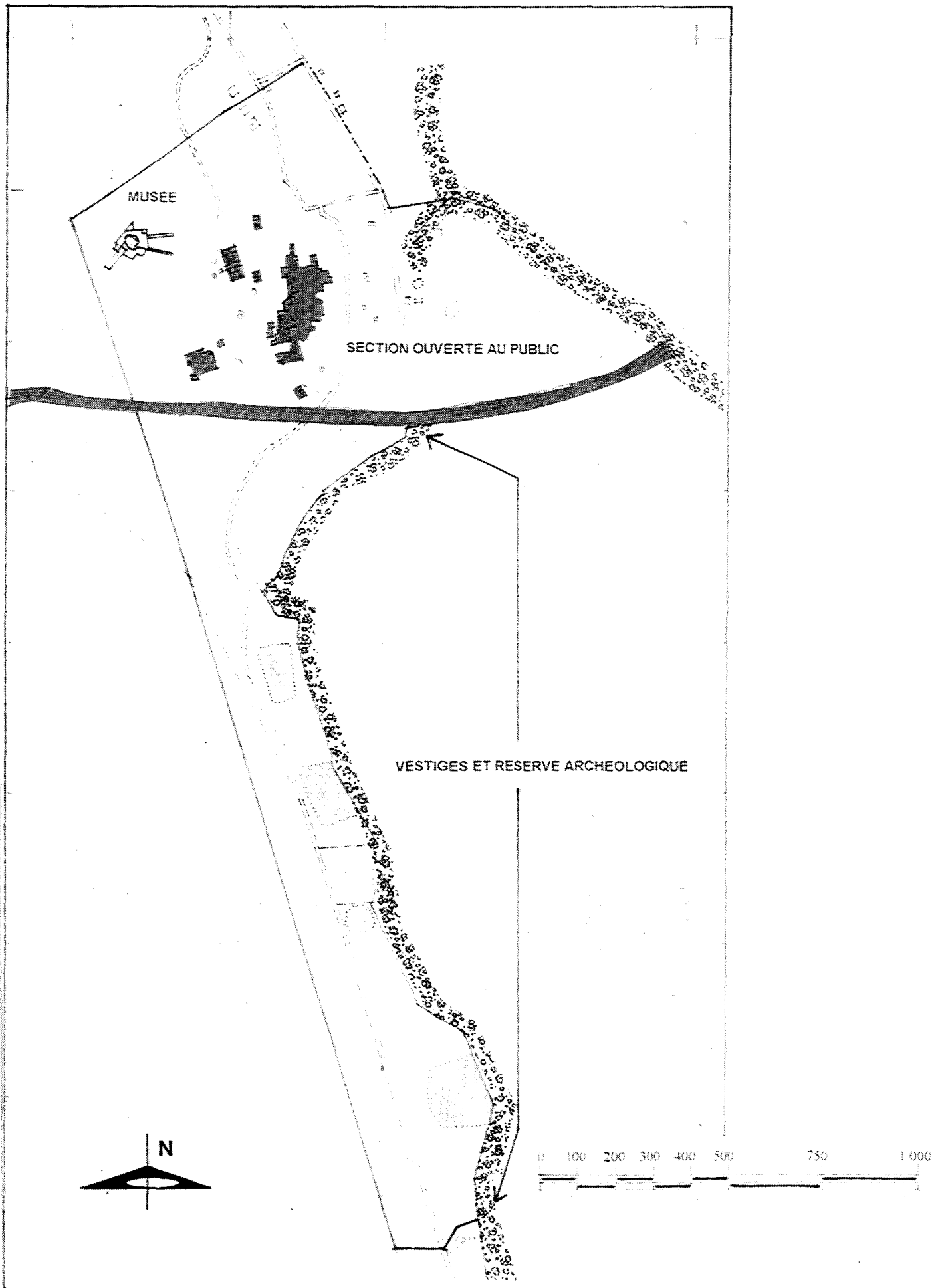
Paquimé Casas Grandes, which reached its apogee in the 14th and 15th centuries, played a key role in trade and cultural contacts between the Pueblo Culture of the south-western USA and northern Mexico and the advanced civilizations. Its extensive remains, only part of which have been excavated, bear eloquent testimony to the vigour of this culture, well adapted to its physical and economic environment, which was to disappear abruptly with the Spanish Conquest.

#### **Recommendation**

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

*Criterion iii*: Paquimé Casas Grandes bears eloquent and abundant testimony to an important element in the cultural evolution of North America, and in particular to prehispanic commercial and cultural links.

*Criterion iv*: The extensive remains of the archaeological site of Paquimé Casas Grandes provide exceptional evidence of the development of adobe architecture in North America, and in particular of the blending of this with the more advanced techniques of Mesoamerica.



**Zone archéologique de Paquimé, Casas Grandes / The archaeological zone of Paquimé, Casas Grandes :  
Plan de délimitation / Delimitation plan**