

**A) IDENTIFICATION**

Nomination : Algiers Kasbah  
Location : City of Algiers  
State party : Algeria  
Date : 6 March 1990

**B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION**

That inclusion of this cultural property on the World Heritage List be deferred to permit a comparative study of medinas of this cultural area to be undertaken.

**C) ICOMOS OBSERVATIONS**

While convinced of the universal cultural value of the Algiers Kasbah, ICOMOS suggested the need to confirm the commitment of the authorities for the preservation of the site in its initial evaluation. The World Heritage Bureau in June 1991 confirmed this need and further requested ICOMOS to undertake a study of medinas in this region to provide a firm base of comparison for evaluation of the site. ICOMOS has prepared terms of reference for such a comprehensive study which would examine cultural values, authenticity and protective mechanisms among such sites. Completion of the study would require 6-8 months. ICOMOS is satisfied that the letter received October 24, 1991 from the Permanent Algerian Delegation indicates firm commitment to preservation of the Kasbah on the part of the Algerian authorities.

**D) BACKGROUND**

The Algerian nomination concerns the ancient city of Algiers, located between the kasbah (fortress) and the seashore. The history of the city of Algiers is even more complex and turbulent than that of the entire country. Located on the seashore, the site was inhabited from at least the sixth century B.C., when a Phoenician trading post was established

there. Carthaginians, various Berber tribes, Romans, Byzantines and Arabs (beginning in the seventh century) took turns coveting and ultimately taking the city. Spain's expansionist policy also embraced Algeria and took advantage of weakness among local power due to rivalries between the smaller Maghreb states which emerged from the Berber invasions.

A Turk corsair, Khair-al-Din, who was welcomed by the local population with open arms, founded his capital in Algiers (1516) and made a large part of the modern Algerian coast dependent on the Ottoman sultan. The central power at Istanbul intervened relatively little in administration of the region, and the bey ruled as master in his city where military might and trade joined forces to produce great economic prosperity.

The modern Kasbah originated from the fortified Turkish city (actually a medina, which took its name - by extension - from the fort built on the hill). Construction of the city began in 1516 and continued up to the seventeenth century. Although the administrative and military organization implied the presence of many Turks, Algiers at that time should not be viewed as an Ottoman city. The city combined the science of Turkish military architecture with Arab-Mediterranean architectural traditions (simple or luxurious houses with terraces arranged around a central "atrium"). The flourishing state of trade is expressed in the extreme richness of the interior decoration of houses in Algiers. The rather unique natural site (a sharp slope that plunges from the fort down to the sea) is the reason for the winding streets, veritable meanders, that are characteristic of the ancient city.

European misunderstanding of the Arab lifestyle on the one hand, and, on the other hand, settlers' desire for their own customs and architectural and urban aesthetics combined to produce grave destruction. Fortunately, part of the city was saved by a certain taste for the ancient city's "exotic" features, and by the inconveniences associated with the location of the site on a slope (locals attracted to new economic development resettled below the slope). In the 1920s, real interest was expressed in safeguarding the ancient city. However, the Algerian authorities ordered the first studies for safeguarding the Algiers Kasbah only in the early 1970s. At that time it was classified as an historic site and a vast restoration and upgrading plan was adopted for the ancient city. A very intelligent redevelopment plan is under

way for the Kasbah, to introduce modern comfort without upsetting the traditional urbanism and architecture and to restore the Kasbah's original functions: residential, commercial and cultural quarters.

The Algiers Kasbah, particularly once the rehabilitation under way is completed, will be confirmed as an outstanding example of an historic Maghreb city with specificities related to the natural site and history of the city - despite the destructions due to poor preservation of the ancient urban fabric. The Algiers Kasbah preserves very interesting traditional Arab-Mediterranean houses in which the ancestral Arab lifestyle and Moslem customs have blended with other architectural traditions.

The ancient city of Algiers also bears precious testimony to some of the most outstanding historic events in the history of the Algerian people.

ICOMOS, November 1991