

**Identification**

<u>Nomination</u>	Coro and its dunes
<u>Location</u>	State of Falcón
<u>State Party</u>	Republic of Venezuela
<u>Date</u>	28 September 1992

**Justification by State Party**

Coro is the largest town with buildings of earthen construction in Venezuela, and one of the most important in the Caribbean region. This technique is still in use, after a long period of disuse. Unlike other towns on this coast, even its public buildings are of earthen construction, not stone. In this, and in its plan, deriving from the towns of Andalusia and the Canary Islands of the 15th century, it exercised considerable influence over other settlements in the region. To a basis of Mudéjar architecture it added a native tradition and Spanish technical expertise and also, from the late 17th century, Dutch architectural influences, to create something unique. Coro is the only surviving example of this remarkable fusion of styles over time. The town is also important for the large number of ecclesiastical buildings and ensembles that it contains.

**History and Description**History

The city of Santa Ana de Coro was founded in 1527 by the expedition sent from Santo Domingo by Juan de Ampiés, factor of the Spanish Crown there. Before the arrival of the Spaniards, the area was inhabited by Caquetíos Indians, who irrigated the land by means of a large channel from a dam on the Coro River, which explains the choice of site. The settlement acquired legal status with the creation of a municipal council in 1529.

The land between the Cabo de la Vela and Maracapana, in which Coro is situated, had been granted by the Spanish Crown to the Welser banking family of Augsburg, and the first governor of Coro was a German, Ambroise Alfinger. From Coro expeditions left to explore Lake Maracaibo, the Sierra de Perrijá, the Venezuelan Llanos, and the Andean region between Colombia and Venezuela, whilst in the quest for Eldorado expeditions from Coro even reached the sources of the Orinoco. One of its governors, Nicolas de Federman, led a group across the Andes to be present at the foundation of Santa Fé de Bogotá. The Welser-financed explorations made an important contribution to the opening up of the region before they were forced to give up their concession in 1556.

The Christianization of the province also had its roots in Coro. In 1531 Pope Clement VII created the first bishopric in South America there. This resulted in the small town being elevated to the grade of city. In 1583 work began on the site of the first church on the construction of the cathedral proper. However, Coro was exposed to pirate raids by virtue of its position, and so in the early years of the 17th century the seat of the governor was transferred to Caracas, to be followed in 1637 by the bishopric. The city survived, despite devastation by pirates in 1567, 1595, and 1659, maintaining trade relations the nearby Dutch colony of Curaçao and other Spanish Caribbean cities. It also developed and consolidated agricultural activities in its hinterland, notably of sugar cane and cocoa.

The periodical pirate raids, allied with the disastrous cyclone of 1681, explain why the present-day town has a largely 18th century appearance. Reconstruction was leisurely, but marked by the early introduction of roof tiles and the use of unbaked bricks. Wealthier citizens raised their buildings to two storeys and embellished them with ornate facades.

A slave revolt in 1795 had a grave impact on the agricultural economy and consequently on the city itself. However, economic recovery resulted from the introduction of sheep farming and coffee growing. With this recovery, Coro's political role increased, and it regained its earlier position as seat of a governorship in 1812. This new prosperity was to end with its virtual destruction during the War of Independence in 1821.

With the establishment of the Republic and Bolívar's free immigration policy, a large foreign colony, mainly from the Dutch West Indies, settled in Coro, and it expanded in relative prosperity. The oil boom of the present century has had only a negative effect on the city, but it has benefited in that it has not suffered the fate of neighbouring cities such as Maracaibo or Barquisimeto in losing much of its architectural heritage.

### Description

The historic centre of Coro covers 107 hectares (inclusive of the buffer zone). Within it there are three distinct sectors, corresponding with the official protection zones.

In the monumental centre, which covers 25.28 hectares, are concentrated the official National Historical Monuments: the Cross of San Clemente, commemorating the foundation of the city, four churches, the Franciscan convent, the main chapel of the old Royal Hospital, and eleven large secular buildings, all dating from the late 16th century (the Cathedral) and the end of the 18th century. To the east of the monumental centre there is the Church of San Gabriel with its buffer zone.

The zone of historical and artistic value (60 hectares) covers the monumental zone and its own protection zone, and contains 602 buildings, of which 19 are National Historic Monuments and 346 are colonial, republican, or traditional.

The zone of controlled architecture (45 hectares) lies to the north, west, and south of the previous zone. Its southern sector represents the city's expansion in the 19th century. There are 716 buildings in this zone of which 434 are traditional (mostly of earthen construction).

The nomination also includes the natural site, the Parque Nacional Médanos de Coro (Coro Dunes National Park). This covers an area of 91,280 hectares and is made up of three ones - an alluvial plain, an aeolian (wind-blown) plain, and a littoral plain. The alluvial plain is formed by the delta of the Mitare River and some smaller streams. The aeolian plain is constituted of three types of dunes - active dunes, dunes in the process of stabilization, and stabilized or fossil dunes. The littoral plain is a belt of mangrove swamps.

## **Management and Protection**

### Legal status

The historic centre of the city of Coro is covered by the following ordinances:

- Law for the Protection and Preservation of the Antiquities and Works of Art of the Nation 1945;
- Decree concerning the Historic Zone of Coro issued by the Municipal Council of Miranda District 1968;
- Resolution of the National Committee for the Protection of the Historic and Artistic Heritage of the Nation 1977, designating the central part of Coro as a National Historic Monument;
- Decree of the Municipal Council of Miranda District 1982 defining the Protection Area of the Historic Zone;
- Resolution of the National Committee for the Protection of the Historic and Artistic Heritage of the Nation 1991 annexing the Protection Area to the Historic Zone and creating a wide zone of building control around it.

The Coro Dunes National Park was created by Decree of the National Executive in 1974 and is protected by the Organic Environment Law 1976, the Land Planning Act 1983, and the Environmental Penalties Law 1991.

### Management

Ownership of the historic centre of Coro is vested in public authorities and private individuals and organizations. The National Park is in State ownership.

Management of the historic centre of Coro is vested at the national level in the Junta Nacional Protectora del Patrimonio Histórico de la Nación and the Consejo Nacional de la Cultura and at the local level by the Junta Regional del Patrimonio Histórico y Artístico de la Nación and the Ayuntamiento del Municipio Autónomo Miranda. Studies are currently in progress for the creation of an ad hoc organization for centralizing the preserva-

tion and conservation of the old city, with the participation of interested bodies.

The National Park is managed by the Ministerio de Ambiente y Recursos Naturales and the Instituto Nacional de Parques (IMPARQUES).

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### Conservation history

There is a long tradition of conservation of the architectural heritage at Coro, dating back to the early 18th century. However, major efforts began in the 1950s, when a plan for the protection of the city's heritage was presented to the Municipal Council. Work was carried out on several important houses, whilst the Cathedral was restored in 1957-9.

The Junta Protectora y Conservadora de Patrimonio Histórico y Artístico de la Nación, founded in 1945, has been responsible for a series of decrees for the protection of the historic centre of Coro since 1957.

There are permanent funds at central and local government level for repair and restoration work. The Congress of the Republic had recently allocated special funds for heritage work, of which 300,000,000 bolívares are earmarked for Coro. Many projects have been carried out by government bodies and private individuals.

In 1987 the Ministry for Urban Development published its Estudio del Area de Valor Histórico de Coro. Subsequently the Regional Executive commissioned the Fundación para el Rescate y Conservación de Inmuebles, Localidades y Bienes de Valor Histórico, Religioso y Cultural (FUNRECO) to prepare a Plan especial de Conservación y Revitalización para los Centros Históricos de Coro y La Vela; the object of this plan is the development of a strategy for acquisition, conservation, and development of historic centres and the creation of the necessary statutory instruments. FUNRECO is associated with the Universidad Nacional Experimental Francisco de Miranda, which has been involved in such projects for many years. It is intended that the plan shall include measures to improve the quality of life for the inhabitants as well as the protection of the heritage.

### Authenticity

Coro has experienced many vicissitudes since its foundation. Much of what survives dates from the 18th century. Conscious efforts have been made since that time to ensure that the urban fabric has remained intact and that the unique character of the city, resulting from the extensive use of earthen construction, has been retained.

## **Evaluation**

### Qualities

Coro is an outstanding example of an historic town, dating from the earliest years of Spanish colonization on the Caribbean coast of South America, which has conserved its original layout and early urban landscape to a remarkable degree. For the past three decades both national and local government authorities have been zealous in improving the protection that is afforded to Coro and in making resources available for this purpose.

### Comparative analysis

Although a number of the Spanish colonial settlements on this coast, such as Maracaibo, were originally primarily of earthen construction, Coro is the only one in which such structures have survived intact to the present day.

### Additional comments

An ICOMOS mission visited Coro in April 1993 and had discussions with the competent authorities. The ICOMOS suggestion that the area proposed for designation in the historic centre of Coro should be reduced, but that at the same time the historic core of the port of La Vela should be added to the nomination, was accepted and a revised nomination is being prepared.

The nomination from the Republic of Venezuela includes the Coro Dunes National Park. ICOMOS is not competent to comment on this property, which is of solely natural interest and cannot be considered as constituting a cultural landscape.

## **Recommendation**

That this nomination be referred back to the State Party, proposing the reduction of the proposed area in the historic centre of Coro and the addition of the historic core of La Vela.

ICOMOS is not competent to evaluate the claim of the Coro Dunes National Park for inclusion on the List.

ICOMOS, October 1993

