

**Identification**

<i>Nomination</i>	La Lonja de la Seda
<i>Location</i>	Ayuntamiento de Valencia, Province of Valencia
<i>State Party</i>	Spain
<i>Date</i>	13 October 1995

**Justification by State Party**

The City of Valencia considers that La Lonja de Seda should be inscribed on the World Heritage List for its special nature and its beauty. It is aesthetically unique of its kind, superior to similar buildings in Palma de Mallorca and Barcelona, because of its fine Gothic architecture and Renaissance decoration, the results of the Mediterranean art of the 15th century. Its trading hall, supported gracefully on spiral columns, is connected with the Consulado building, seat of the historic tribunal, with the magnificent coffered ceiling of the Cambra Dourada, from the former City Hall.

La Lonja is a typical representation of the commercial and financial past of the City of Valencia in the 15th century which has been used for the same purpose for five centuries: it is a commercial building, formerly for the oil and silk trade and now for cereals. It is the seat of the traditional Royal Academy of Culture of Valencia. The honesty of its traders and the justice of its syndics are commemorated in the inscription that runs round the trading hall. It was the first commercial institution to be founded, in 1408, as a bank and an exchange whose operations took place on the "Taula de Convis." Every foreign traveller who wrote about Valencia was captivated by the beauty of the building. This beauty, combined with the culture characteristic of the golden age of the 15th century, justifies the inscription of the Lonja on the World Heritage List, and this is strengthened by the fact that for five centuries the purpose for which it was built has been respected - for trade, the symbol of a Mediterranean city that has been committed to agriculture and export from the 14th century to the present day.

**Note** The State Party does not make any proposals concerning the criteria under which the property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List in the nomination dossier.

**Category of property**

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, La Lonja de la Seda is a *monument*.

**History and Description***History*

In 1469 the decision was taken to build a new Lonja (exchange or market) in Valencia. It was not until 1482 that the city authorities purchased houses on the site chosen for the building, but work began at the end of that year under the direction of the architects Pedro (Pere) Compte, Juan Iborra (Yvarra), and Johan Corbera. The main Sala de Contratación (Contract or Trading Hall) and the tower were completed in 1498, and derived its inspiration from the Lonja de Palma de Mallorca, built in 1426-48; the entire complex, including the Consulado (Consolat) and the garden, was not finished until 1533, under the direction of Domingo de Urteaga.

Its original function was as a trading exchange for oil. It developed into the main maritime trading centre and the silk exchange, and housed the commercial institution known as the "Consolat de Mar," which was founded in 1283, and the Taula de Convis i Deposits, a banking institution established in 1408 and named after the table (*taula*) over which its transactions took place. At the present time it is still a major trading exchange, now dealing primarily in agricultural products.

The Lonja is also the seat of the Cultural Academy of Valencia. As such it serves as the venue for many exhibitions and other cultural activities.

## *Description*

The land occupied by the Lonja is rectangular in plan. Nearly half the total area is covered by the main Sala de Contratación; the Tower (including the Chapel), the Consulado, and the large garden complete the ensemble. The entire building is constructed in limestone from Masarrochos.

The Sala de Contratación is a magnificent hall (35.60 m x 21.39 m x 17.40 m high), in Flamboyant Gothic style like the rest of the ensemble. The lofty interior is divided into three main aisles by five rows of slender spiral pillars from which spring the elegant vaulting of the roof. The floor is of different coloured marbles from Alcubias. A Latin inscription in Gothic characters runs round the walls, which proclaims the principles upon which trade within the hall is based. It is lit by soaring Gothic windows, the external frames of which, like the doors, are exuberantly ornamented, notably by a series of grotesque gargoyles. In the centre of the main facade on the Plaza del Mercado is the imposing doorway, crowned by an image of the Virgen del Rosario, and above the royal arms of Aragón. The fine windows on either side are surmounted by the arms of the town. The same architectonic scheme is repeated at the other end of the hall. This building, like the rest of the ensemble, is crenellated.

Access to the Chapel (dedicated to the Conception of the Virgin), which forms the ground floor of the Tower, is from the Sala de Contratación. It is square in plan, with vaulting springing from corner column clusters. Access to the upper floors of the Tower is via a remarkable helical stone staircase. The room on the first floor was originally a prison for bankrupt traders.

The Consulado building (now the seat of the Cultural Academy of Valencia) rises to three storeys; the interior spaces measure 10.25 m x 8.35 m in plan. It is a later form of Gothic and equally exuberant in the decoration of its facades, especially on the upper floor, where the windows have highly decorated sills and lintels and are crowned by portrait medallions. The interior is notable for the carved decoration, gilded and painted, in the chamber on the first floor (the *piano nobile*), known as the *Cambra Dourada* (Gilded Chamber); the coffered ceiling came from the old City Hall, now demolished.

It is worthy of comment that the environs of the Lonja, although not included in the nominated area, retain close links with the history of the building and preserve its role as the commercial centre of the city. The large Market Hall, with its metal framing of 1914-28, is built on the site of the original market, whose activities were intimately associated with the Lonja, whilst the church of St John attended to the spiritual needs of the merchants.

## **Management and Protection**

### *Legal status*

The ensemble of La Lonja de la Seda was declared a National Historical Artistic Monument in 1931.

### *Management*

The property is owned by the Ayuntamiento de Valencia, which manages it through its Cultural Department. This body has its own maintenance and conservation staff which works on this ensemble and other historic properties in Valencia. It is held in high regard by the citizens of Valencia and serves as the focal point for many civic and cultural activities.

The whole area is currently the object of a major programme of urbanization, involving the rehabilitation of many private houses, the restoration of public buildings, and improvement of the infrastructure. This is intended to restore the historic centre for residential use and to reintroduce cultural activities by bringing, in particular, students back to the area.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

Since the buildings have all been in constant use since they were constructed in the 15th century, they have been maintained regularly and to a very high standard. Rehabilitation work is currently in progress in the basements.

### *Authenticity*

The authenticity of La Lonja de la Seda de Valencia is high: it has been maintained meticulously for five centuries and restoration has respected the original materials, so as to preserve the overall appearance of the buildings.

Very few elements have been introduced or significant modifications made since the 15th century. The stucco ornamentation of the doorway communicating between the chapel and the main building, added in 1832, is faithful to the original decorative scheme, and the extra height given to the tower when the roofs were repaired in 1891-1920, with its crenellation, also reproduces the style of the original structures that flank it.

### **Evaluation**

#### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Valencia in February 1996.

#### *Qualities*

The ensemble of La Lonja de la Seda de Valencia is a remarkably well preserved example of a commercial building in Late Gothic monumental style of exceptionally high artistic quality that has remained in use for the same purpose for five centuries. It is an outstanding symbol of the role played by merchants from the Iberian peninsula in the Mediterranean and beyond in the 15th and 16th centuries.

#### *Comparative analysis*

The mercantile expansion in Europe from the later Middle Ages onwards produced many outstanding architectural works used for secular, commercial purposes - guild halls, exchanges, markets - in a number of countries around the Mediterranean and the North Sea. These appear not to have been studied as a group on a European scale, and a comparative study should be made of the extent of the survival and distribution of this type of monument on a European level (Palma de Mallorca, Barcelona, Perpignan, Pisa, Genoa, Palermo, Venice, North Africa, the Levant, etc). However, ICOMOS is of the opinion that La Lonja de la Seda de Valencia possesses such outstanding intrinsic artistic qualities that its inscription on the World Heritage List should not be deferred to await the completion of such a study.

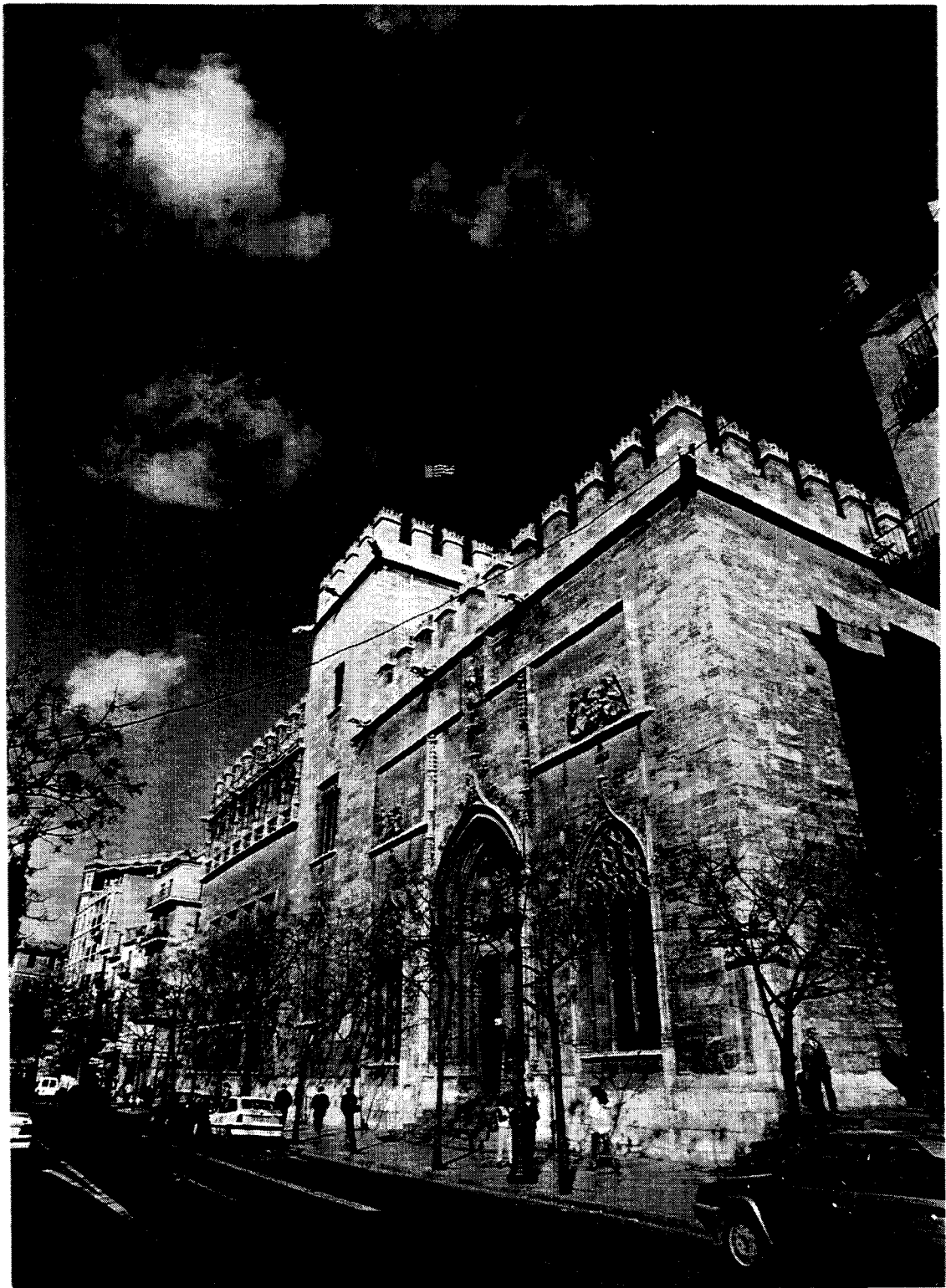
### **Recommendation**

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

La Lonja de la Seda de Valencia is a wholly exceptional example of a secular building in Late Gothic style, which dramatically illustrates the power and wealth of one of the great Mediterranean mercantile cities.

ICOMOS, October 1996





Valence : la Lonja de la Seda, extérieur  
Valencia : la Lonja de la Seda, exterior