

**Identification**

<i>Nomination</i>	The prehispanic town of Uxmal
<i>Location</i>	State of Yucatán, Municipalities of Muna and Santa Elena
<i>State Party</i>	Mexico
<i>Date</i>	26 September 1995

**Justification by State Party**

Uxmal has long been recognized as one of the most important sites of the Maya culture, along with Chichen Itzá, Palenque, Tikal, and Copan, and as the centre of the Puuc region of southern Yucatán. It was the urban and ceremonial centre for a group of settlements in the southern part of the Yucatán peninsula, the most important of which were Kabáh, Labná, Sayil, and Xpalak, for four centuries during the Late Classic Period (AD 650-1100).

**Criterion i**

Recent studies have shown that the layout of the buildings in the ceremonial centre was based upon very accurate astronomical observations and alignments. Their facades are arranged in two horizontal elements, the lower plain and the upper richly decorated. These compositions often bring together in a harmonious way many elements from other Mesoamerican styles and cultures.

**Criterion ii**

For reasons that remain unknown, the rich civilization that produced this exceptional architectural ensemble, which has survived to the present day as evidence of its universal value, disappeared around the end of the 11th century.

**Criterion iii**

The architectural ensemble at Uxmal is unique by virtue of its composition, its construction, and its decoration, best demonstrated by the Cuadrangulo de Las Monjas, the Palacio del Gobernador buildings, and the Piramide del Adivino. These are masterpieces of one of the styles that make up the overall Mayan culture, the Puuc style, in the Late Classical Period, when this culture was about to disappear.

**Criterion iv****Category of property**

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Uxmal is a *site*.

**History and Description***History*

The 16th century Mayan history known as *The Books of Chilam-Balam* dates the foundation of Uxmal to the later 10th century, but archaeological investigations and radiocarbon dating suggest that the main structures in the complex were built between AD 700 and 1000. The earliest settlement in the area was around 800 BC (Pre-Classic Maya Period), but its main development and eventual disappearance was in the Late Classic Period (AD 650-1000), notable for the communications and movements between different regions of Mesoamerica.

There are many small valleys in the Puuc region which permitted substantial farming activities; in the Spanish colonial period it was considered to be the "granary of Yucatán," producing two crops a year. In the Mayan period this was the basis for trade and the exchange of ideas, and probably also people, with other parts of Mexico. This is well illustrated by the Puuc artistic tradition, the evolution of which also demonstrates the economic, political, and religious development of Uxmal.

In the first phase, Uxmal was able to transform itself from a peasant town into a political and administrative centre. A series of hydraulic works, such as reservoirs for storing water, date from this phase. The second phase was that of the great urban capitals of the theocratic states that dominated the south-west of Yucatán, of which Uxmal was among the most important. It was a period when great public buildings were constructed, and when the population of the town reached some 25,000 people.

The period between 1000 and the arrival of the Spaniards was that of commercial states and kingdoms. In fact, this lasted only two hundred years at Uxmal, since it was abandoned around 1200. The Yiu then settled there and formed the alliance known as the Mayapán League with the neighbouring towns of Chichén Itzá and Mayapán. It was a period of great prosperity, when other urban centres grew up and contested control of the region with Uxmal; the town wall reflects this situation. The Mayapán League broke up during the long war between Chichén Itzá and Mayapán in 1441-1541. Uxmal was abandoned by its inhabitants and became no more than a place of pilgrimage until the conquest by the Spanish, who gave the surviving buildings their existing names, which have little to do with their true functions.

#### *Description*

Uxmal forms the centre of the Puuc ("hill" or "chain of low mountains") region which covers some 7500 km<sup>2</sup> in the south-western part of the State of Yucatán. Round it, some 27 km away, there are four large settlements - Kabáh, Sayil, Labná, and Xlapak.

Unlike most other prehispanic towns, Uxmal is not laid out geometrically. Its space is organized in a more subtle way, seemingly based on two main principles. First, the buildings are orientated in relation to astronomical phenomena, such as the rising and setting of Venus. Secondly, they are adapted to the topography of the site, made up of a series of hills.

The main characteristic of Puuc architecture is the division of the facades of buildings into two horizontal elements. The lower of these is plain and composed of carefully dressed blocks broken only by doorways. The upper level, by contrast, is richly decorated with symbolic motifs in a strongly plastic style; the individual blocks make up a form of mosaic. There are sculptures over the doorways and at the corners of the upper level, almost invariably composed of representations of the head of Chaac, the rain-god.

#### *- Pirámide del Adivino (Pyramid of the Soothsayer)*

By virtue of its height and bulk, this structure dominates the ensemble, despite its location in a lower-lying part of the site. It is 35 m high and elliptical (85 m X 50 m) in plan. It is made up of five superimposed elements, two of them reached by monumental stairways on either side of the structure. It is from the Late Classic Period (AD 700-900) and brings together several artistic traditions, including the Toltec of central Mexico.

The western lower building (Temple I) dates from the earliest phase of the settlement. Within the structure, on the eastern side, is the small Temple II, and on the opposite side is a smaller element, known as Temple III. This was extended to form Temple IV, which stands out from the main pyramid and is richly decorated with masks of Chaac. The final phase in the evolution of the building is Temple V, built around 1000-1050 in the closing years of Uxmal.

#### *- Cuadrángulo de las Monjas (Quadrangle of the Nuns)*

This group of four buildings arranged round a large trapezoidal courtyard (65 m x 45 m) is situated on an artificial platform and reached by means of a stairway on the southern side leading to a monumental gateway. Each of the buildings is at a different level. The principal building, on the north side of the complex, is the only one that is two-storeyed; it is also the highest of the four. The decoration is especially rich, and is recognized to be an outstanding example of Mayan abstract and geometric art.

#### *- Palacio del Gobernador (Governor's Palace)*

This elongated building is constructed on a levelled natural feature and consists of three elements joined by covered vaults, the highest in the Mayan region. It is acknowledged to be one of the masterpieces of Mayan art for both its architecture and its decoration. It is severely symmetrical, its long facade being breached by two monumental entrances, and the exterior of the upper storey is ornamented with rhythmically ascending masks and frets. Representations of the rain-god again surmount the main doorways and the corners of the building.

#### *- Casa de las Tortugas (The House of the Tortoises)*

This building is located on the same terrace as the Governor's Palace. It is simple in design but the overall effect is harmonious. The upper storey is decorated only with a series of slender columns supporting a robust cornice decorated with sculptures of tortoises, each different.

#### *- The Ball Court*

Despite its smaller dimensions (43 m x 10 m) when compared with other prehispanic examples such as those at El Tajín, Xochicalco, or, in particular, Chichén Itzá, the Uxmal example is of importance because of its

location within the complex, in relation to the main structures. In style and construction it can be dated to the same period as the Quadrangle of the Nuns.

- *The Southern Complex: Grande Pirámide (Great Pyramid), Palomar (Pigeon House), and Southern Group*

This part of the site has not been extensively investigated. The nine-component structure known as the Great Pyramid is less striking than the Pyramid of the Soothsayer. Its upper temple, known as the Temple of the Parrots, has a richly decorated lower storey, unlike other buildings at Uxmal, and probably dates to the earliest phase of the town. The Pigeon House seems to be one of the components of another quadrangular complex, like the Quadrangle of the Nuns.

## **Management and Protection**

### *Legal status*

The Federal Law of 4 May 1972 on Archaeological, Artistic, and Historical Monuments and Zones establishes public ownership of all archaeological properties, even if these are situated on privately owned lands. This applies in the case of the Hacienda Uxmal, where part of the archaeological zone is located. The buffer zone is covered by a decree of 1994.

### *Management*

The group of archaeological monuments that make up the nominated area, covering 875 m<sup>2</sup>, are Federal property. Part of the buffer zone is owned by the Municipality of Santa Elena, but the major part belong to the privately owned Hacienda Uxmal; both are covered by the 1972 Federal Law.

Management of the heritage aspects of the site is carried out as part of its duties under the 1972 Federal Law by the Yucatán Regional Centre of the National Institute for Anthropology and History (INAH), which is an agency of the National Council for Culture and the Arts (CNCA) and the Ministry of Public Education (SEP). Matters relating to land-use, urban development control, and ecological environment control are the concern of the Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL).

There is an INAH staff of 22 people at Uxmal, responsible for guardianship and maintenance work. Research and conservation work is carried out by specialists from the Regional Centre at Mérida. The SEDESOL Regional Centre is also involved in land-use and environmental aspects of management. The Cultural Institute of the State of Yucatán is responsible for the management of the site museum and its service unit, established in 1986 with a permanent staff of 25 people.

There is no specific management plan for Uxmal, where the lack of threat from, for example, urban development means that normal INAH maintenance and research programmes constitute adequate provision. INAH resources are concentrated on sites that are at greater risk, such as the neighbouring Puuc settlements of Labná, Sayil, Kabáh, and Chacmultun.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

The earliest reports on the state of conservation and on cleaning and protection work at Uxmal were produced in 1913 and 1914; these were followed by another, dealing with emergency works, in 1926. The Government began its campaigns of conservation and restoration in 1927; there were periods of more intensive activity in 1937-40, 1941-49, 1948-53, 1955, 1969-73, 1977-78, and 1992-94. Systematic archaeological work began in 1940, carried out by US archaeologists, and has continued since that time, carried out by Mexican specialists in association with conservation and restoration activities.

Work on reforestation and tidying up of the whole area has also been in progress over recent years. A new system of signage has been introduced and the museum was set up 1986, along with better parking facilities.

### *Authenticity*

As with any archaeological site, it is difficult to apply the test of authenticity, so long as there have been no major essays in reconstruction. The work carried out over some seventy years at Uxmal has been confined to consolidation and anastylosis, well within the parameters laid down in the 1964 Venice Charter.

## Evaluation

### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Uxmal in February 1996. ICOMOS also consulted a world expert on Mayan archaeology on the cultural significance of the site.

### *Qualities*

Uxmal is an outstanding example of a Mayan ceremonial site. It is of especial interest by virtue of the very high quality of its architecture and ornamental art, which blend elements from other parts of Mexico with those indigenous to Yucatán.

### *Comparative analysis*

It is generally recognized that there are five outstanding monuments of the Mayan civilization - Chichen Itzá, Palenque, and Uxmal (Mexico), Tikal (Guatemala), and Copan (Honduras), each with its own special qualities and contribution to an understanding of that civilization. All of these except Uxmal are already inscribed on the World Heritage List; the addition of Uxmal would complete the representation of Mayan civilization.

### *ICOMOS comments*

Given the group nature of the five Mayan sites listed above, it is interesting to note that each is inscribed under a different set of criteria: Chichen Itzá i, ii, iii; Palenque i, ii, iii, iv; Tikal i, iii, iv; and Copan iv and vi. Especially surprising is the fact that Copan is not inscribed on the basis of criterion iii.

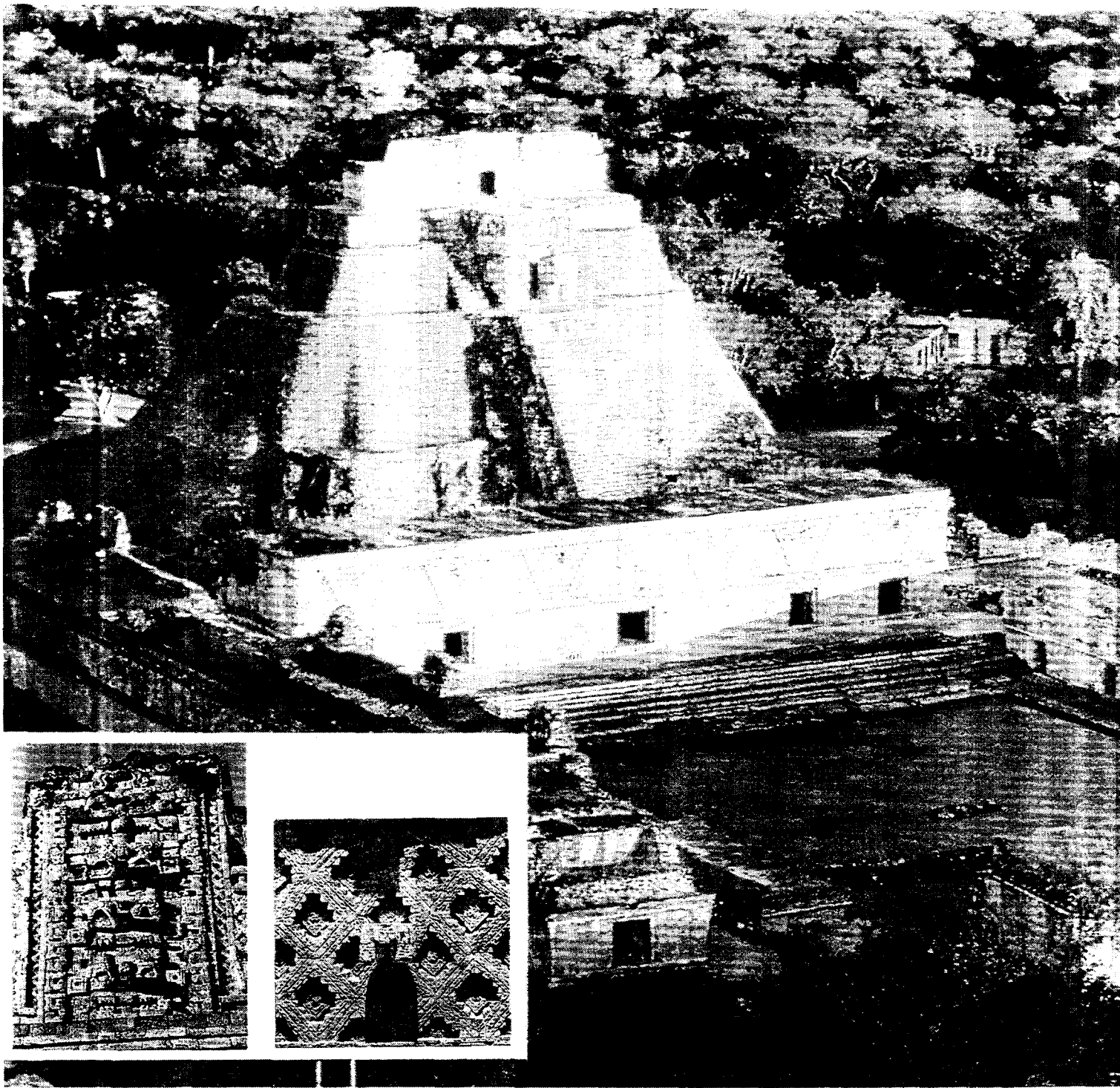
The report of the ICOMOS mission drew attention to the *son et lumière* installations on the site (which it described as "one of the most impressive pre-Columbian monumental complexes in the whole of prehispanic America"), and urged the responsible authorities to take steps to make them less obtrusive. It also suggested that consideration be given to the extension of the nomination to include the four related sites of Kabáh, Labná, Sayil, and Xlapak.

## Recommendation

That this nomination be referred back to the State Party, requesting that it undertake to reduce the visibility of the *son et lumière* installations, and also to consider the possibility of extending the nomination to cover the four related sites of Kabáh, Labná, Sayil, and Xlapak. In the event that the State Party accedes to these requests, ICOMOS recommends that the property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of ***criteria i, ii, and iii***.

The ruins of the ceremonial structures at Uxmal represent the pinnacle of late Mayan art and architecture in their design, layout, and ornamentation.

ICOMOS, October 1996



Uxmal : la Pyramide du Devin

Uxmal : the Pyramid of the Soothsayer