

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Tallinn (Estonia)

No 822

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The historic centre (Old Town) of Tallinn
<i>Location</i>	City of Tallinn
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Estonia
<i>Date</i>	19 July 1996

Justification by State Party

The Castle of Toompea and the Hanseatic town at its foot were among the most remote and most powerful outposts of civilization in the north-eastern part of Europe in the 13th-16th centuries. Tallinn is a well preserved ensemble in the chain of trading towns on the sea-coasts of the Baltic established in the process of colonizing the eastern lands. The international artistic culture resulting from the meeting of very diverse movements, from the Cistercians and Dominicans to the Teutonic Order and the traditions of the Hanseatic League, forms part of the mosaic of the overall artistic and architectural scene of northern Europe.

Criterion ii

Tallinn is the best preserved medieval town in northern Europe, a unique example of the coexistence of the seat of feudal overlords and a Hanseatic trading centre within the shelter of a common system of walls and fortifications. It is an ensemble of buildings that are largely authentic and which form an urban structure created in the 13th-14th centuries, with a radial street network, town walls, ecclesiastical and monastic complexes, and a characteristic skyline that is visible from a great distance from both the sea and the land approaches.

Criterion iv

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Tallinn is a *group of buildings*. It conforms with the category of historic town defined in paragraph 27(ii) of the *Operational Guidelines* (1997).

History and Description

History

Archaeological investigations have shown that a fort on the limestone plateau of Toompea and a trading post and harbour at its foot, on the Viking route to *Miklagård* (Constantinople), have existed since the 10th-11th centuries. With the expansion of Baltic trade, the settlement known at that time as Lyndanise (Reval in German, Kolyvan in Russian) was occupied in 1219 by troops of Waldemar II of Denmark, who strengthened the fortifications on Toompea and built the first church.

After coming under direct Papal jurisdiction in 1226-27, the town was assigned to the crusading Order of the Brethren of the Sword (later to be merged with the Teutonic Order), who divided the settlement into two parts - the fortress (*castrum*) and the lower town (*suburbum*). In 1230 the Order invited two hundred German merchants from Gotland to Tallinn, where they settled around a new church dedicated to St Nicholas, alongside the existing Estonian, Scandinavian, and Russian trading posts. They were quickly followed by the Dominican and Cistercian Orders, who established the monasteries of St Catherine and St Michael respectively.

In 1248 Tallinn adopted the Lübeck statute, becoming a full member of the Hanseatic League in 1285, as a key station on the trade route between the Baltic lands and the interior of Russia. Its prosperity was reflected by its rapid growth in the 14th century: work began on the massive town wall in 1310, enclosing an area laid out according to the characteristic Baltic trading pattern with radiating streets. Along with the territory of northern Estonia the town was sold in 1345 to the Teutonic Order, who promptly sold it on to the Livonian Order, and it was the latter who were responsible for rebuilding the castle on Toompea as one of the strongest in the region.

With the fall of Visby in 1361 the importance of Tallinn, along with Riga, increased substantially. The 15th century saw the transformation of the town, with the construction of a new town hall and other public buildings and the rebuilding of the merchants' wooden houses in stone.

Despite the decline of the Hanseatic League from the 15th century, the commercial role of Tallinn survived and the town continued to be embellished with fine public and domestic buildings according to prevailing architectural taste. It was annexed by Sweden in 1561, and it was Swedish architects who were responsible for the reconstruction of the Toompea area after a disastrous fire in 1684 and for the addition of a system of bastions to the fortifications.

In 1710 the town surrendered to the troops of Tsar Peter I and entered into a half-century of commercial and cultural stagnation, but this came to an end when its role as a provincial administrative centre was confirmed, with the castle as its seat. Tallinn continued in this role, with relatively few but very

significant additions right up to the early years of the 20th century.

During World War II, when Tallinn was under German occupation after a short-lived period of Estonian independence between 1918 and 1940, the town was heavily bombed in 1944. The church of St Nicholas and the area around it suffered grave damage and destruction. The church was carefully reconstructed and now serves as a museum, with an open space around it. Buildings around the church, although constructed in the "Stalinist" style, respect the scale and proportions of the rest of the historic town.

Description

The Old Town of Tallinn covers 35ha of the 85ha enclosed by the fortifications, which define the conservation area that is proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List. Within this area, 44.5% is covered by buildings, 23.5% by streets and squares, and the remainder by green open spaces.

The most prominent feature of the town is the Toompea limestone hill. The western part is occupied by the castle, of which the 35m high tower known as "Long Hermann," two bastions, and the imposing walls, still rising to nearly 10m, survive on the western, northern, and eastern sides. Within the enceinte is the Cathedral, which is basically Gothic but has been extended and reconstructed on a number of occasions since the Middle Ages.

The lower town preserves to a remarkable extent the medieval urban fabric of narrow winding streets, many of which retain their medieval names, and fine public and burgher buildings. The distribution of building plots survives virtually intact from the 13th-14th centuries.

The Town Hall (1371-1404), which now houses the municipal museum, has been preserved with its medieval appearance. Around it, in Town Hall Square, there are some exceptionally well preserved burgher houses. These are high gabled structures in stone, the ground floors having been used for living quarters and the upper storeys as granaries and storehouses, many retaining their original projecting winch beams. Passage-ways through the buildings lead to courtyards, many of which contain simple functional buildings of the 18th and 19th centuries in stone or wood, a unique survival in northern Europe.

An outstanding structure is the House of the Great Guild (1410), on Pikk Street, which is a splendid example of Northern Gothic with fine vaulted ceilings and richly decorated columns. Other important buildings in this street are the House of the Brotherhood of Black Heads, rebuilt in the Dutch Mannerist style (1597-1600), and the former House of the Guild of St Olaf.

There are several medieval churches within the walls. The restored Church of St Nicholas (Niguliste) and the Church of St Olaf (Oleviste) are both in typical basilican form, with lofty vaulting and a precise geometry of form in what is recognized to be the distinctive Tallinn School. In the Middle Ages the spire of Oleviste was one of the highest in

Europe. The equally impressive Church of the Holy Spirit served the non-German inhabitants of Tallinn. There are two monastic complexes surviving within the walls - the Dominican monastery of St Catherine and the Cistercian nunnery of St Michael, which was characteristically sited away from the main urban complex.

The town defences have been preserved over large sections of their original length. Of the original eight gates, eleven outlying towers, and 27 wall bastions, 26 survive, and the sections of the wall itself still rise to over 15m in places. Particularly noteworthy are two massive artillery towers of the early 16th century, affectionately known to the inhabitants as "Kiek in de K ok" (Peep into the Kitchen) and "Fat Margaret" (the latter now houses the maritime museum).

Management and Protection

Legal status

The Old Town of Tallinn is an integral conservation area, statutes governing the extent and regulation of which were initially laid down in 1966: the area designated at that time included Toompea, the lower town, and a green belt of bastions around them. These provisions were endorsed by the Republic of Estonia in Decree No 81 of 27 February 1995, when the area was modified and extended and strong Conservation Statutes were promulgated. Any activity within the designated area must be approved, in accordance with Article 4 of the Republic of Estonia Conservation Act. There is also a large number of buildings within the area that are individually protected as immovable monuments. The designated conservation area is surrounded by a legally designated regulation zone, which constitutes an effective buffer zone, since the height and scale of buildings within it are controlled.

Ownership of properties within the conservation area is shared among a number of institutions (the Republic of Estonia, the City of Tallinn, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church) and private individuals and organizations. In accordance with the Republic of Estonia Fundamentals of Property Reform Act of 13 June 1991, a process of restitution of state and municipal property to its former owners (including church authorities) and the privatization of individual buildings is in progress.

Management

Management is the responsibility of individual owners, whether institutions or private citizens. Responsibility for the preservation of designated historic buildings and other structures is vested in the Republic of Estonia Central Board of Antiquities (Riigi Muinsuskaitseamet). This central body collaborates closely with the Tallinn City Council (Tallinna Linnavolikogu) and its Heritage Preservation and Planning Departments and with the Central Borough Government (Kesklinna Linnaosa Valitsus).

The first regeneration plan for the Old Town was approved in 1971. In 1988, when the former Soviet Union ratified the World Heritage Convention, work began on drafting a new state building law and building regulations for Tallinn, the former coming into effect in June 1995 and the latter in July 1993.

On 1 December 1994 the City Council decided that work should begin on a new master plan for the town, working at two levels - a strategic plan and a more traditional general plan (the latter with the aid of the Canadian Urban Planning Institute).

A Tourism Development Plan was drawn up in 1994-95 by a volunteer group, concentrating on the preservation of the heritage of the Old Town. This is in the final stages of discussion with the City administration.

The Tallinn Heritage Preservation Department was responsible for the outline preservation concept included in the integrated urban development strategic plan, work on which began in 1995. Work on the general master plan, which does not cover the Old Town but does affect its immediate surroundings, started the following year. The drafting of special regulations for the Old Town conservation area and local plans for those blocks that were badly damaged in World War II has not yet started.

Regeneration and reconstruction work is largely financed at the present time by private capital. This work is subject in principle to strict control by the Central Board, but the degree of surveillance and intervention has been affected adversely by the recent political and economic changes. Only the most important and urgent conservation work, such as that on the town walls, is funded from central and municipal resources.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Conservation work began in Tallinn in the closing years of the 19th century, under the leadership of Georg Dehio and Walther Neumann. The latter, who was influenced by both Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc and whose conservation philosophy has inspired successive generations of Estonian conservation architects, was responsible for work on a number of important buildings, in particular the House of the Black Heads.

Although a Built Monuments Protection Committee was created by the City Council as early as 1891, no byelaws or regulations were promulgated until the creation of the Republic of Estonia in 1918. The first Cultural Values Protection Law was passed in 1923 (amended in 1925 and 1936). During this period a number of major restoration projects were carried out, notably by E Kühnert on St Olaf's Guild House and the Dominican Monastery.

After World War II restoration and conservation projects were carried out partly as expressions of national identity in defiance of the Soviet regime. The scientific restoration workshop set up in 1950

was responsible for important work on, for example, the Church of St Nicholas, the Town Hall, the Kiek in de Kök tower, and the town walls.

When the Old Town became a conservation area in 1966, it was the first in the Soviet Union. The comprehensive inventory of the architectural heritage of the Old Town carried out in the 1960s over an area of 105ha covered 480 individual buildings, of which 128 were designated as protected monuments in 1973.

The opening up of Tallinn to foreign visitors in the 1960s provided the incentive and the funding for more ambitious restoration and conservation programmes, extending now to entire city blocks rather than single buildings, as hitherto. There was a relatively short period when emphasis was placed on reconstruction, but this was soon abandoned in favour of the more traditional approach, based securely on the principles laid down in the Venice Charter, and this policy has continued to the present day.

Authenticity

As with any historic town centre that has been subject to the changing principles of conservation philosophy over a long period, and where a considerable area was severely damaged during World War II, Tallinn contains a proportion of buildings and other elements whose authenticity does not wholly conform with current perceptions and practices. It has, however, retained its medieval street plan, set out in the 13th century and unchanged since then, to a remarkable degree. This is well endowed with buildings of the 14th-16th centuries, making the townscape one of the finest examples of a medieval trading city.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

To evaluate the cultural significance of Tallinn, ICOMOS consulted its International Committee on Historic Towns and Villages, and also a distinguished Swedish expert, who was responsible for coordinating the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes Project on the towns of the Hanseatic League. An ICOMOS mission visited Tallinn in October 1996 to report on its conservation and management.

Qualities

To quote the Council of Europe report, "Tallinn is one of the most well-preserved medieval towns in northern Europe." It is the most outstanding example of a Hanseatic League town during the major phase of this great trading organization, and forms an excellent counterpoint to Visby, which is the outstanding example of its earlier phase.

Of the six major northern towns of the Hanseatic League, Visby declined in the 14th century and Tallinn took its place. Stockholm and Riga were in some ways more important members of the League, but neither has retained its medieval features to the extent that Tallinn has, and Novgorod and Pskov

have fared even worse. From Tallinn, Hanseatic models of town planning and building methods spread widely into eastern and central Europe. It was also an important base for the mendicant orders to penetrate that region.

Comparative analysis

Over 220 towns in northern and eastern Europe were associated in some way with the powerful medieval group of trading towns known as the Hanseatic League. Of these, only two are comparable in their completeness and their authenticity with Tallinn according to the distinguished Norwegian medieval historian who assisted ICOMOS when Visby was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1995 - Visby itself and Bruges (Belgium).

In addition to Visby, there are seven other Hanseatic towns on the World Heritage List - Goslar, Lübeck, and Quedlinburg (Germany), Vilnius (Lithuania), Bergen (Norway), Kraków (Poland), and Novgorod (Russia). Each of these may, however, be considered to have qualified for inscription on the basis of criteria additional to their qualities as medieval trading towns of the Hanseatic League.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

ICOMOS is concerned by the comments made by the State Party in the nomination dossier regarding the impact on the heritage resulting from the entry of Estonia into the market economy and from the policy of restitution and privatization of property now in progress. However, it recognizes that inscription on the World Heritage List will be a positive force in strengthening protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of Tallinn, and that delay in doing so might cause irreparable damage to that heritage.

The regulation zone around the Conservation Area, which is nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List, includes some of the quarters around the Old Town, and in particular some of the wooden buildings of Kalamaja and the harbour district. ICOMOS recommends that consideration be given to the inclusion of the most significant part of this area in the nominated area.

The route of the peripheral relief road (which is much needed, since road traffic has more than doubled in the past six years) runs within the green belt of the Conservation Area. ICOMOS recommends that this route be reconsidered, so as to avoid encroachment upon the immediate environment of the potential World Heritage site.

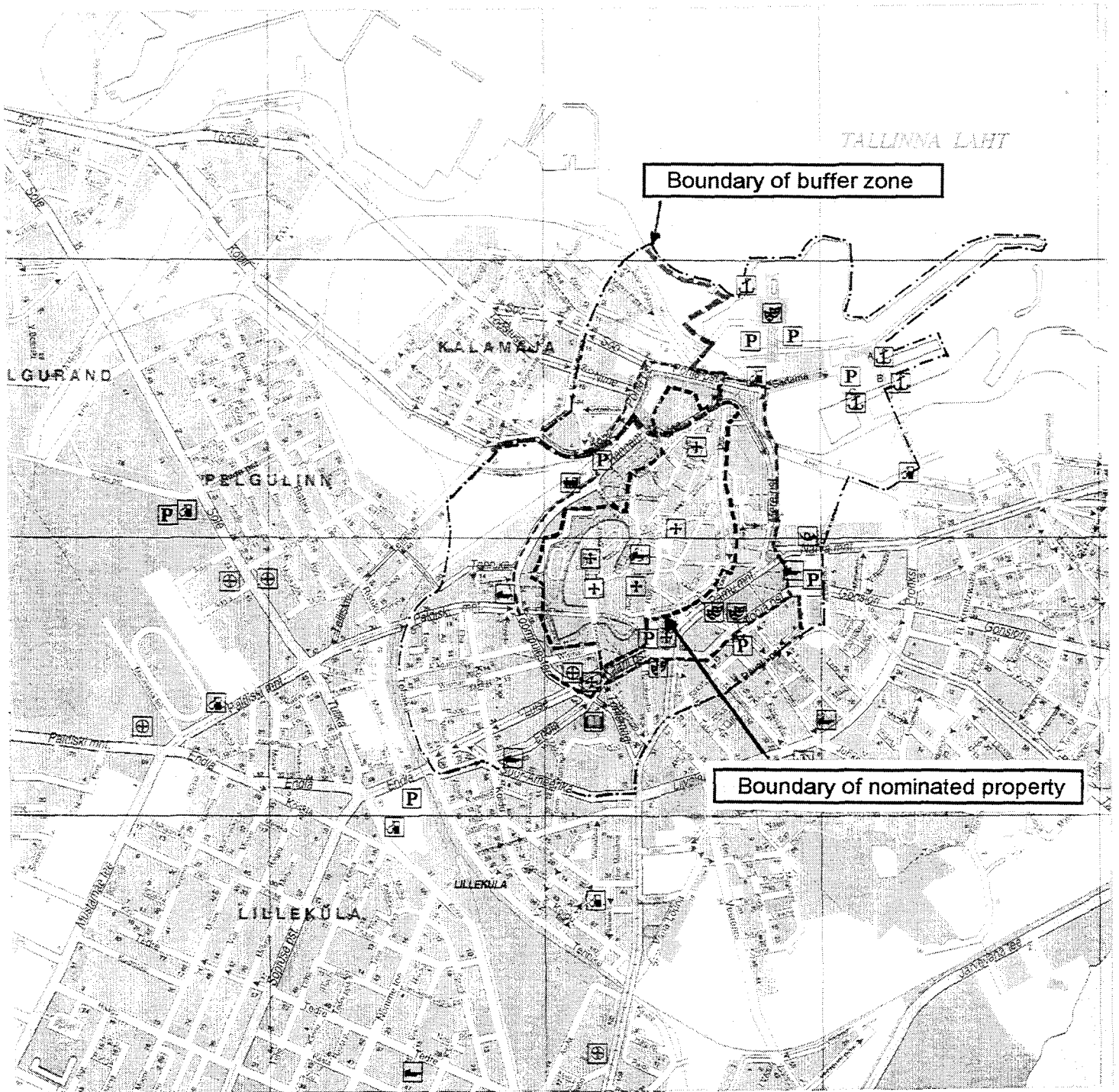
The policy of "reducing building density" within the Old Town by selective demolition of buildings of little intrinsic value needs to be applied with restraint, since this density is in itself an important factor in the historic townscape.

Recommendation

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

Tallinn is an outstanding and exceptionally complete and well preserved example of a medieval northern European trading city that retains the salient features of this unique form of economic and social community to a remarkable degree.

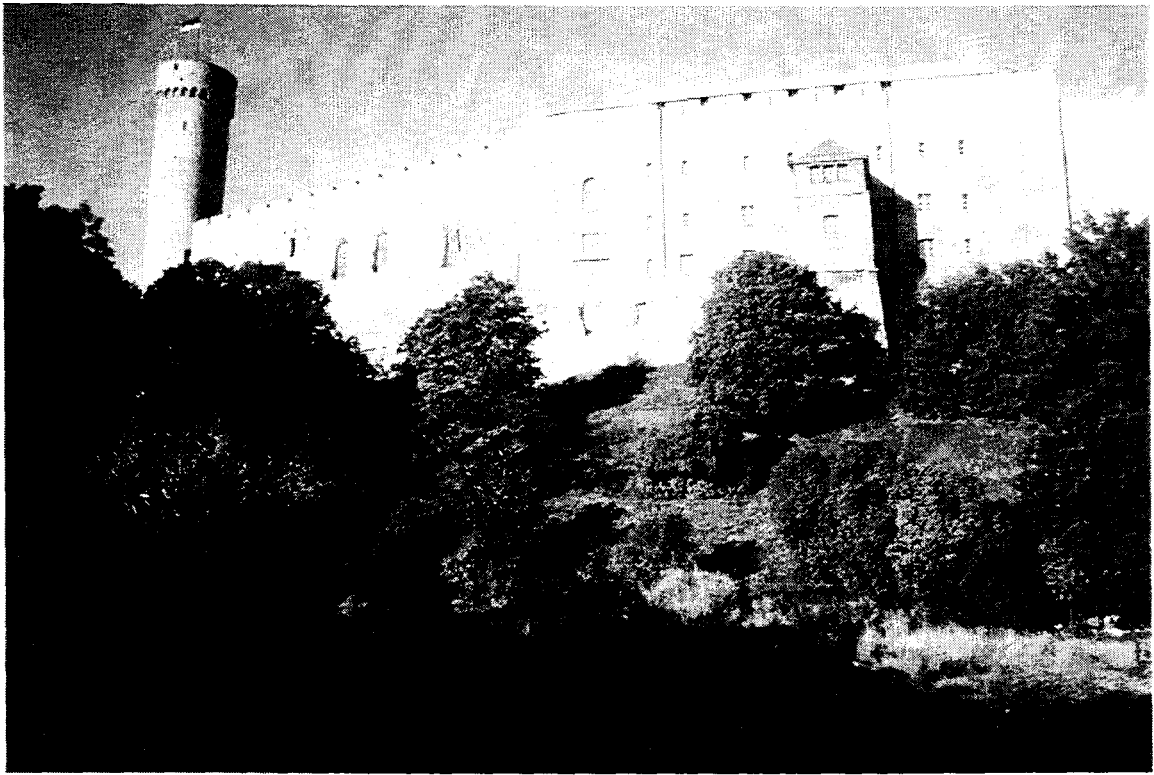
ICOMOS, September 1997



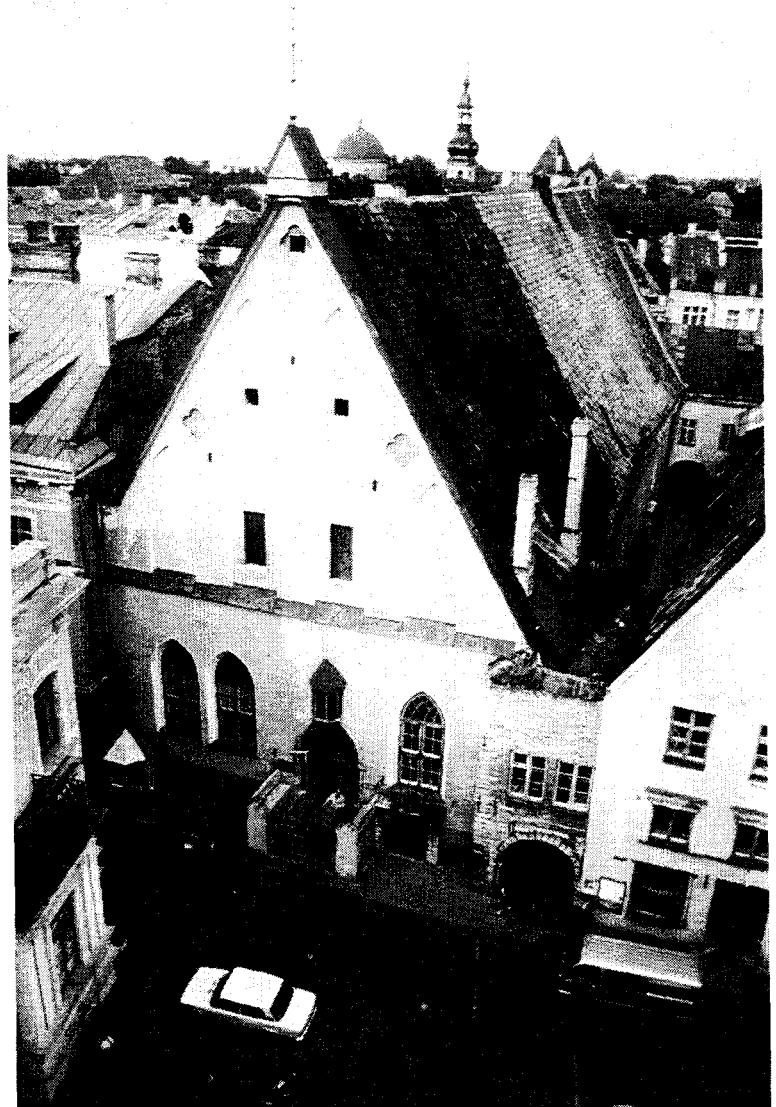
Tallinn :

**Plan de la ville indiquant le centre historique proposé pour inscription et
la zone de protection (zone tampon) /**

Map of the town, showing nominated historic core and protection area (buffer zone)



Tallinn :
Château de Toompea, vu de l'ouest /
Castle of Toompea, from the west



Tallinn :
Maison de la Grande Guilde /
The House of the Great Guild