

Chiloé Churches (Chile)

No 971

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The churches of Chiloé
<i>Location</i>	Municipalities of Castro, Chonchi, Dalcahue, Puqueldón, Quemchi, and Quinchao, Chiloé Province, X Region de los Lagos
<i>State Party</i>	Chile
<i>Date</i>	24 June 1999

Justification by State Party

The Spanish conquest was not just domination and exploitation. In the case of Chiloé, as in others, the intercultural dialogue between the dominating and the dominated parties, between missionaries and evangelized peoples, between the indigenous population and Europeans, was remarkable.

In Chiloé Europeans had to confront an unknown, isolated, and hostile environment. The remoteness of this land from the great American cities and the difficult conditions of the environment stimulated Spaniards to learn the customs, knowledge, and technologies of the native people. Missionaries, for their part, had to learn their language and culture in order to evangelize them in their own tongue. For this purpose they used a method in accordance with the local geography and the indigenous settlement pattern and mentality.

Factors of an economic nature, plus the menace of corsairs, discouraged the concentration of the Spanish population in the cities they had founded. During the 17th century they dispersed and began living in areas occupied by native peoples, near the shore. Spaniards began to imitate their lifestyle and to adopt their building, farming, and fishing techniques. They also learned their language which began to prevail in the relationship between the two groups, at the expense of Spanish.

The missionaries had to adopt an evangelization system in keeping with the natives' scattered and non-urban way of life. With the establishment of the Peripatetic Mission, which took the Word of God to each area, the archipelago began to be urbanized, thus giving rise to the majority of the Chilota villages. When the time came to build the chapels, the missionaries had to entrust the work to the natives who, while applying their technological knowledge, followed the order of the Europeans, thus creating a type of architecture

and construction that was a local synthesis of both experiences.

These two groups became one, thanks to racial interbreeding and cultural cross-fertilization. The urban structure of the Chiloé settlements, its relationship with the landscape, the Chilota school of architecture in wood, and the Chilota culture in its entirety constitute a synthesis that reflects three human potentials: making optimum use of the resource offered by the environment, being able to learn from one another and befriend one another, and transcend earthly existence. **Criterion ii**

The Chilota cultural tradition arising from that synthesis, which has its symbol and its testimony in the churches, is still living. This life permeates spirituality, mentality, and material aspects such as technologies, building techniques, etc. **Criterion iii**

The people of Chiloé have an identity of their own, which is different and distinguishable within the context of the country. They are aware, to a large extent, of this identity and difference. In Chiloé the pride of its inhabitants in their own history and attachment to their own traditions is noteworthy. However, economic development and globalization of communications are having an impact on vast sectors of the population.

This has resulted, for instance, in an occasional lack of awareness of the worth of the churches and the importance of preserving their authenticity when interventions are being made. It has also resulted in a loss of the traditional knowledge of vernacular architecture and building. Likewise, it has produced a deterioration of the natural environment: in the past the timber industry caused significant disturbances, but today it is the salmon industry that is creating the greatest uncertainty in this respect. Finally, both development and globalization have had repercussions on the sense of community, sometimes giving way to individualism, isolation, and marginality. These phenomena, however, have not been massive and are certainly not irreversible. On the contrary, a reaction of the community itself, and of their authorities and priests, is strongly perceptible. **Criterion v**

The Chiloé churches are the material expression *par excellence* of the entire culture of the Archipelago, a culture resulting from evangelization, Christian values, inter-cultural dialogue, sense of community, and the desire for transcendence. Moreover, this culture has been founded on knowledge of its milieu and in harmony with it, a fact that can be appreciated in its technology, economy, urban and architectural patterns, and conception of the world.

Every society has a conception of the world which places man in relation to God, his fellow-men, and his environment. In getting to know the Chilota culture, the outside observer is able to appreciate in all its magnitude how free it is of all the problems which distress more modern societies. The relative poverty of these communities contrasts with their rich spirituality, which results not only in religiosity but also in artistic creation, mythology, and wisdom. Their relative isolation is compensated for by their sound social and community feeling: the community rather than the authorities is the protagonist of its own destiny. Values such as solidarity and participation are fully in force, as the beautiful tradition of the *minga* demonstrates. The environment for its part is a value for the Chilote, who has based his culture on it

and is fully aware of the consequences of breaking the harmony between man and nature.

Criterion vi

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

In the 16th century the inhabitants of the Chiloé archipelago followed a sedentary way of life, based on a mixed farming and fishing economy. Spanish navigators had discovered the Archipelago by the mid 16th century, but colonization did not begin until 1567, when Martín Ruiz de Gamboa founded the towns of Santiago de Castro and Chacao on the Isla Grande de Chiloé.

The Spaniards were impressed by the mild, receptive character of the local people. The universal *encomienda* system was applied, whereby the indigenous people paid tributes to the Spanish crown by working for the settlers in return for food and religious instruction. There were occasional native revolts, of which the most serious occurred in 1712, occasioned by the harsh treatment of the natives by the *encomenderos* of the time, who accused the Jesuits of having inspired the revolt, which was brutally repressed.

Missionaries had arrived with the first settlers, from the orders of St Francis and Our Lady of Mercy. Following an exploratory visit in 1608, the Society of Jesus began sending its members to initiate the process of evangelization that was to shape the cultural features of the Archipelago and to result in the building of the churches that figure in the present nomination.

The Jesuit strategy was encapsulated in the Peripatetic Mission. Annual tours were made by groups of Jesuits setting out from their College in Castro during the temperate months. They spent a few days at each of their missions according to a planned schedule; the missions had been founded close to the shore so as to permit these tours to be made by boat. While there they would attend to the spiritual and material needs of the communities. At first these missions were not permanently inhabited, but over time the Jesuits began building chapels and lodgings for their members, constructed by the local community using local materials and techniques. They appointed laymen, chosen from the leading families, to serve as *fiscales*, to care for the church and its cemetery and to minister to the basic spiritual needs of the community. This was in the Jesuit tradition, which encouraged active development of their own social and religious life by indigenous communities. By the end of the 19th century over a hundred churches had been built; between fifty and sixty survive to the present day.

Pirate raids were a feature of the 17th century, and the Spaniards living in the towns began to desert them in favour of greater security in the countryside. By so doing they took over the lands of the indigenous people, increasing racial and cultural assimilation between the two groups. The majority Chilota group in the Archipelago is the result of this process of interbreeding (*mestizaje*). Christianity was embraced by

the natives whilst the Spaniards adopted the local language, *Veliche* (now extinct), for communication. The Spaniards also adopted the way of life of the local people, engaging in fishing and agriculture and using their technologies.

When the Jesuits were expelled in 1767 their work was continued by the Franciscans, who appreciated the value of the Jesuits' work and actively continued it. They used the Peripatetic Mission as the basis for the creation of nine centres, each with its own area of work. This was to become the present parish system, created in 1840.

Despite the efforts of the Spanish colonial power, the towns became no more than administrative centres, and by the time colonial rule came to an end there were no more than five towns (*villas*) in Chiloé. The strategic importance of the Archipelago was recognized, however, and it was dependent on the Captaincy General of Lima rather than that of Chile. The military garrison was stationed in the fortress of San Carlos de Ancud, founded in 1768.

The Chilota population was deeply loyal to the Spanish Crown. When the struggle for Chilean independence began in 1810, Chiloé became the headquarters of the Spanish operation to recover Chile and Peru. Although this failed, Chiloé remained a Spanish enclave after Chile finally won its independence in 1818; it remained the last foothold of Spanish rule in South America until it was incorporated into the new Republic eight years later.

Chiloé enjoyed a period of prosperity in the 19th century. Its ports were visited by ships travelling south and its timber was a major export. This came to an end at the end of the century, as a result of the opening of the Panamá Canal and the over-exploitation of the islands' cypress and larch trees. During the first half of the 20th century the economy also suffered from serious problems in agriculture and stock-breeding. As a result there was substantial Chilota emigration southwards, to Patagonia and the Magallanes Straits area. At the present time the economy of the Archipelago is developing on the basis of the controlled industrial exploitation of the natural resources (timber and fish) and traditional agriculture and fishing.

Description

The Chiloé Archipelago extends from the Chacao Canal to the Corcovado Gulf. Its centre is the Isla Grande de Chiloé, where the majority of the population (*c* 100,000 inhabitants) live. Between Isla Grande and the mainland there are some two hundred islands, most of them very small; fifty of them are occupied by *c* 18,000 people. The best living conditions are on the sheltered eastern sides of the islands, and here the inland sea affords safer conditions for coastal transport and communications. The original thick forest cover still survives in some places.

The nomination consists of fourteen churches: Achao (Quinchao); Quinchao; Castro; Rilán (Castro); Nercón (Castro); Aldachildo (Puqueldón); Ichuac (Puqueldón); Detif (Puqueldón); Vilipulli (Chonchi); Chonchi; Tenaún (Quemchi); Colo (Quemchi); San Juan (Dalcahue); and Dalcahue.

The traditional Chiloé churches are located near the shore, facing an esplanade, which in some cases has been developed into a true *plaza* (Achao, Dalcahue) but elsewhere is no more than an open space defined by a fence or trees

(Quinchao). Its size is determined by the importance of the religious festivals that take place there.

The churches consist of a large volume with a pitched roof. The most typical feature of these buildings is the tower facade, on the side facing the esplanade. It is made up of an entrance portico, the gable wall or pediment, and the tower itself. This became the focus of urban development in these communities.

The portico is a characteristic feature of the earlier churches, but is lacking in those built in the 20th century. Its basic pattern is one of columns and arches or lintels, with great variations in number, form, and rhythm. The use of regulating layouts and Golden Sections has been established at Vilupilli, Dalcahue, Tenaún, and it is possible that this may apply in other churches.

The tower is the dominating vertical feature, both as a religious element supporting the Cross and also as a beacon for sailors. Most are of two or three storeys, with hexagonal or octagonal drums to reduce wind resistance. Only at Tenaún are there smaller flanking towers.

The horizontal volume of the church varies, but depth is favoured over width. They conform with a basilican ground plan with three aisles, only the central one extending to the back wall. The aisles are separated by solid wooden columns on stone pads; these support a huge beam that forms the ridge. In most cases the main nave is barrel-vaulted, the flanking aisles having flat ceilings. Achao with its segmented ceiling and Rilán with fan vaulting are rare exceptions. The latter is clearly influenced by Gothic architecture, and elements of other major architectural styles can be recognized – Classicism at Chonchi, Renaissance at Nercón, and Baroque at Achao. Everywhere there is abundant evidence of the Chilota mastery of working wood.

The characteristic form and materials of the churches show virtually no variation over four centuries. The main structure is cypress wood, the upright and horizontal timbers being braced by diagonals. The 45° pitched roofs, also of cypress, are covered with larch shingles. The barrel vaults and ceilings are suspended from the roofs. Floors are of wooden planks.

The ornamentation of the churches is profuse and varied. On the exterior, it is to be found on the clapboarding and doors and in the form, number, and rhythms of the arcades and the windows in the gable wall. The windows in particular display a great range of sizes and shapes. The interiors display the craftsmanship in wood of the builders on the columns and the arches linking them and on the altarpieces. There is a local school of religious imagery, examples of which are to be found alongside images from Cusco, Lima, or even Spain. Paint is an important element in the decoration: at Dalcahue it takes the form of imitation marble, whilst at Chonchi the barrel vault is painted in blue with white stars.

The most lavishly decorated church is that of Achao, where the exuberant Baroque interior contrasts sharply with its sober exterior. The vaulting is decorated with carved and painted motifs that are repeated on the altar; the columns are Solomonic; and Baroque plant motifs are to be found in profusion. The altarpiece is an outstanding piece of religious art.

All the churches are adapted skilfully to their physical environment. They are built on hillsides, so as to avoid flooding during heavy rains, and are raised off the ground. The north sides are protected against storms, which generally come from this direction. They are fully enclosed structures, as protection against wind and rain, which can be heavy in this region.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The fourteen churches belong to the Ancud Diocese of the Roman Catholic church, which is an entity in public law and enjoys a special legal status under the Chilean Civil Code.

Law No 17,288 is the fundamental tool for the protection of the Chilean cultural heritage. Eight of the Chiloé churches (Achao, Quinchao, Castro, Nercón, Rican, Vilipulli, Chonchi, and Dalcahue) are protected under the provisions of this statute as historic monuments, and the procedure for the listing of the remaining six is in progress. All proposed interventions on historic monuments must be submitted to the National Monuments Council (an agency of the Ministry of Education) for approval. In addition, the Regulating Plans for each municipality provide for the conservation and maintenance of historic monuments within their boundaries.

Management

Direct management of the nominated churches is the responsibility of the Ancud diocesan administration and the local communities. Each church has its own chapel committee, a tradition that goes back to the work of the *fiscales* appointed by the Jesuits, the lay members of which are responsible for different aspects of the management and conservation of the church. The chapel committees are also involved with the *minga*, an ancient Chiloé system for performing certain activities, both for communal buildings and infrastructure and work on behalf of individuals, with the participation of all the members of the community, either through direct labour or the provision of tools or materials. The *mingas de tiradura* are especially well known: these relate to the transfer of an entire building – a house, a barn, or a church – by means of animal and human effort from one place to another, using cylindrical logs.

Under the terms of an agreement signed with the Diocese in 1988, the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Development of the University of Chile provides scientific and technical resources: these include research into the churches and studies on their preservation and restoration needs.

The National Office of Architecture of the Ministry of Public Works is the technical adviser to the National Monuments Council and is responsible for approving and overseeing conservation and restoration projects. The National Monuments Council is supported at provincial level by the Advisory Board on National Monuments of Chiloé Province, set up in 1988. It collaborates with the ecclesiastical and municipal authorities in the protection and management of the churches.

A non-governmental organization, the Friends of Chiloé's Churches Foundation, has carried out fundamental studies relating to restoration projects and has raised funds from the private sector for their implementation.

Whilst none of the churches has a management plan *sensu stricto*, the long tradition of community involvement dating back to their establishment by the Jesuits in the 17th and 18th centuries, combined with the control exercised by conservation agencies at national and provincial level and the scientific input from the University of Chile, ensures that they are managed, conserved, and maintained in a fashion that is wholly in accordance with the requirements of paragraph 24.b.i of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

The Chilean authorities are very conscious of the potential impact of increased tourism on the churches in what is recognized to be one of the most attractive tourist areas in the country by virtue of both its cultural and its natural heritage. There is a detailed regional Tourism Development Master Plan, supported by a Chiloé Tourism Development Plan, which identify potential problems and propose solutions designed to preserve the essential character of the region without prejudicing the economic advantages that will accrue from greater tourism.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Because of the close identification of the local communities with their churches from the outset, something which has continued uninterrupted to the present day, it may justly be claimed that these churches have been conserved continuously since they were built. Over the past three decades their inscription on the national register of historic monuments has ensured that conservation and restoration interventions are now carried out in accordance with the highest modern professional and scientific principles.

Authenticity

There can be little disagreement about the level of authenticity in the Chiloé churches. Their present form represents their original forms and materials, modified by progressive adaptations to external cultural impacts but without damaging the integrity of what have retained over four centuries their original function of worship. Long-established craft traditions and the easy availability of the basic constructional material, wood, have ensured that the spirit of the original constructions and decorations have been preserved and maintained.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Chiloé in January 2000.

Qualities

The group of churches founded by the Peripatetic Mission in the Chiloé Archipelago in the 17th century is remarkable testimony to the missionary zeal and skill of the Society of Jesus and to the effectiveness of its policy of fostering community development and participation. In the materials of which they were built and the techniques of construction and decoration employed the churches represent the harmonious fusion of indigenous and European cultural and religious traditions.

Comparative analysis

In their conception and layouts, the Chiloé churches resemble those of the Jesuit missions of the Guaraní missions in Paraguay. They also share another attribute: the missions in both cases served as the basis for subsequent urban development, unlike the Chiquitos and Moxos missions in Bolivia, which are scattered and lacking in associated settlements.

However, the most significant distinguishing factor of the Chiloé churches is the fact that they were built entirely in wood, which makes them unique within this category of monument. The Paraguayan and Bolivian missions were also timber-built in their initial stages, but were later replaced by stone structures.

The designs of the Chiloé churches are also exceptional. They represent a harmonious fusion in an original solution of two European traditions – the tower facade, probably brought by Jesuits of Central European origin, and the Latin basilican plan – and the indigenous tradition of building in wood, strongly influenced by boat construction techniques, as shown by the forms and jointing of the roof structures.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

No mention is made in the nomination dossier of the existence of buffer zones around the defined protected areas. The detailed and meticulous records for each church are equally lacking in such information. There is no provision for the protection of buffer zones in Law No 17,288, and none of the copies of notices of listing as historic monuments that were supplied make any reference to a buffer zone.

Buffer zones are very important in respect of this group of churches. The ICOMOS mission report emphasizes the uncontrolled urban development in a number of the settlements around churches such as those of Defit, Ichuac, and Rilán and the adverse effect on their settings if there is not strict control over their surroundings. It is essential not only that buffer zones that are adequate to conserve the settings of the churches be defined but also that standards be set for the control of intervention within these zones.

Furthermore, six of the churches were at the time this evaluation was prepared not statutorily protected. This must be a prerequisite for inscription on the World Heritage List, though it is accepted that there may be legal aspects that may need further time for resolution, and so the State Party should be required only to provide evidence that the process of listing has begun and will be completed in the near future.

The report of the ICOMOS mission contains detailed comments on each of the churches within the nomination. This information should be made available to the responsible Chilean authorities.

At the meeting of the Bureau in June 2000 this nomination was *referred back* to the State Party, requesting the definition of buffer zones around each of the fourteen churches that make up the nominated property and the definition of standards of control over development within these zones. The State Party was also required to provide assurances that the six churches so far not protected under Law No 17,228 would be listed within the next two years. The State Party subsequently provided this information and assurances.

Brief description

The fourteen wooden churches of Chiloé represent a rare form of wooden ecclesiastical architecture and the sole example in Latin America. They were built on the initiative of the Jesuit Peripatetic Mission in the 17th and 18th centuries and demonstrate the successful fusion of indigenous cultures and techniques.

Recommendation

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

Criterion ii The churches of Chiloé are outstanding examples of the successful fusion of European and indigenous cultural traditions to produce a unique form of wooden architecture.

Criterion iii The *mestizo* culture resulting from Jesuit missionary activities in the 17th and 18th centuries has survived intact in the Chiloé archipelago, and achieves its highest expression in the outstanding wooden churches.

ICOMOS, September 2000