

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

N° 516

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Natural and Cultural Sanctuary of the Bandiagara
Escarpement

Location : Region of Mopti

State Party : Mali

Date : December 29, 1988

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That this property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion V relative to the inclusion of cultural properties and criterion III relative to the inclusion of natural properties.

C) JUSTIFICATION

In 1979 the government of Mali proposed that the "Dogon Country" be included on the World Heritage List. This is a vast cultural site extending from 14° to 15°5' latitude north and from 1°5' to 4° longitude west. Subsequent to the recommendation made by ICOMOS, the Committee deferred the request in 1981 pending a more precise definition of the property. Following a seminar held at Bamako in 1987 and a on-site visit by an expert from ICOMOS, a new nomination concerning "The Natural and Cultural Sanctuary of the Bandiagara Escarpement" was submitted. Today, the protected zone has been strictly defined and a topological and typological inventory of the traditional Dogon habitats found on the property has been carried out. In addition, a management policy has been outlined for these fragile sites, which are threatened by changing perceptions and socio-economic conditions as well as by the very climate of the Sahel region. Therefore, it is now possible to make a positive recommendation for the inclusion of this property, which in 1981 was retained solely on principle.

Covering an area of 350,000 to 400,000 hectares, the proposed zone stretches from Gani-do in the south/southwest to Kouidianga in the north/northeast, along the road linking Bankas, Koporo, Madougou and Diankabou. Its northern border is the parallel at 14°40' latitude north. Then follows the main road from Komodia to Bandiagara and Gani-do.

Corresponding to the Nommo's chest was the ginna. This large family dwelling was generally built on two levels. The façade was windowless but had a series of niches and two doors often decorated with sculptured rows of male and female characters which symbolized, like the niches themselves, the family's successive generations. The size of the usual house was almost exactly half that of the ginna and generally was on one floor. As in many animist societies women were temporarily excluded from the domestic group during their menstrual period. One or two circular-shaped women's houses were built at one end of the village for their use at this time. According to Griaule, these houses represented the hand of the Nommo in the Dogon symbolic spatial layout.

A deliberate distinction between the sexes was also made in the size of the granaries. Though sometimes circular the granaries were generally square. The men's structure measured 6 cubits on the side (about 2.7 m) whereas the women's measured 4 cubits (about 1.8 m). The symbolic number for men was 3 and its multiples, and for women it was the number 4.

Special areas were reserved for traditional shrines of which a great variety can be found. Some, found in the caves, probably perpetuated the ritual sites of the Tellem cult. Others built of banco conform to several types of architecture. The most venerated are the responsibility of the Hogon, the priest who works for several villages. Living alone, his source of inspiration is the snake, whose totem is often sculpted near the door to his dwelling. The oldest mosques -Islam strongly developed in the Dogon country during the 19th century- were built by local masons alongside the to-gu-na on the village common, where there were also sometimes animist altars or shrines.

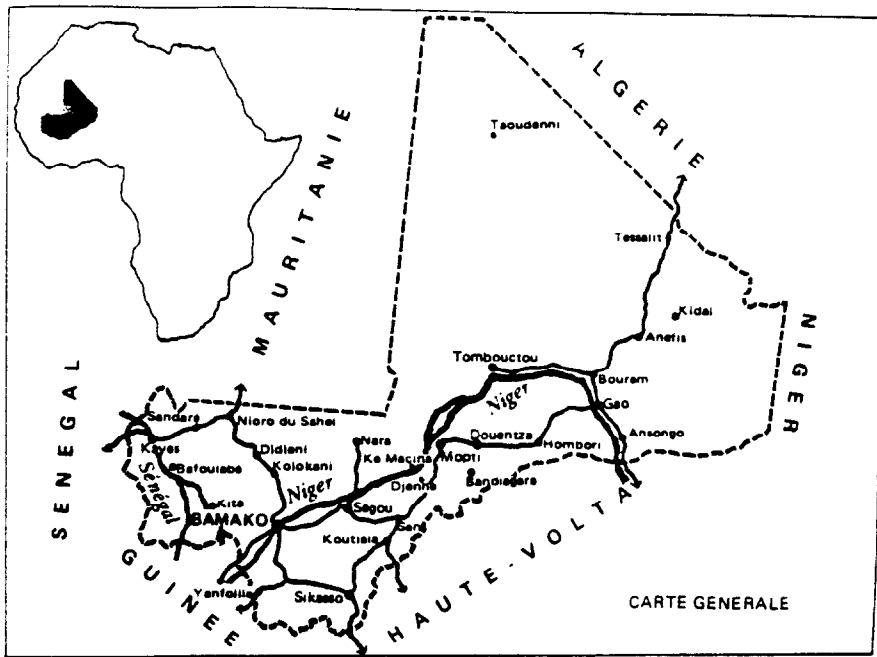
The integration of new elements in the traditional architecture is clear proof of the strength the Dogon civilization was in the face of external contributions. ICOMOS is wholeheartedly in favor of the inclusion of the Bandiagara escarpment on the World Heritage List, on the basis of criterion V relative to cultural properties and of criterion III relative to natural properties. However, it must stress the precarious preservation of these traditional habitats and handicraft techniques, lifestyles and way of thinking which helped the Dogon people to survive. The observations below are accompanied by specific wishes, which for the most part were expressed by Jean-Louis Michon, ICOMOS expert, after his mission in 1988.

The above observations point out the need for the rapid adoption of an integrated conservation plan.

If the inventory of the sites and the protection of cultural heritage can be assured at little expense by measures of regional deconcentration and the creation of a museum, the inclusion on the World Heritage List of a vast zone representative of the Dogon Country demands in exchange a certain number of different investments. Hence digging wells would provide the double advantage of helping to maintain farmers imperiled by the drought and of supplying one of the essential elements in Dogon architecture -water- since water and soil are the two most important ingredients in banco.

Having noted with great interest the conclusions of the mission report prepared on July 18, 1988 by Sheik Oumar Mara, head of the traditional architecture section of the Ministry of Arts, Sports and Culture, and seeing that the Mali authorities and the ICOMOS consultant share the same views, ICOMOS expresses the wish that the measures recommended by these experts be rapidly adopted by the government of Mali.

ICOMOS, April 1989



Map of the Dogon Country