
The Royal Court of Tiébélé (Burkina Faso) No 1713

1 Basic information

Official name as proposed by the State Party

The Royal Court of Tiébélé

Location

Tiébélé

Nahouri

Central South Region

Burkina Faso

Brief description

Located in the village of Tiébélé, 172 km south of the capital Ouagadougou and approximately 15 km north of the border with Ghana, the Royal Court of Tiébélé has been established since the 16th century at the foot of the hill of Tchébili (from which the name Tiébélé is said to originate) in a flat plain, and covers an area of some 1.84 ha.

The Royal Court of Tiébélé is an earthen architectural complex that bears testimony to the social organisation and cultural values of the Kasena people. This type of architecture was developed throughout the Kasena lands, from northern Ghana to southern Burkina Faso.

Enclosed by a protective compound wall, the Royal Court consists of a set of buildings arranged in distinct concessions which reflect the status of their inhabitants, separated by high and low walls and passageways leading to ceremonial and gathering places outside the compound. All the huts are built using earth, wood, cow dung and straw by the men of the Royal Court. They are then decorated with paintings, engravings and low-reliefs of symbolic significance by the women, who are the sole guardians of this knowledge and responsible for its continuation.

Category of property

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

Included in the Tentative List

24 January 2012

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations and technical evaluation mission

Desk reviews and reports have been provided by members of the ICOMOS international scientific committees and independent experts.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the nominated site from 4 to 11 July 2023.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 5 October 2023 to request additional information about the attributes and the description of the nominated property; the justification of the boundaries of the nominated property and its buffer zone; legal protection; management; and interpretation.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 13 November 2023.

An interim report was provided to the State Party on 20 December 2023 summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel.

Further information was requested in the interim report on: funeral rites; mural decoration; traditional and contemporary materials; the boundaries of the nominated property and its buffer zone; and management and conservation.

Additional information from the State Party was received on 22 February 2024.

All the additional information received has been incorporated in the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

13 March 2024

2 Description of the nominated property

Note: The nomination dossier and additional information contain detailed descriptions of this property, its history and its state of conservation. Due to limitations on the length of evaluation reports, this report provides only a short summary of the most relevant aspects.

Description and history

The Royal Court of Tiébélé is an ensemble of buildings, inside an irregularly shaped walled compound, whose plan is defined by blocks or concessions, plots and passageways. In social and spatial terms, the Court is organised into five domains: the domain of the spokespersons; the domain of the princes; the domain of the elder brothers; the domain of the guardians of the drums and sacred flutes; and the domain of the younger brothers.

Each domain is arranged around mother houses or *Dinian*, the foundation structures of the domain, with a figure-of-eight floor plan. Reserved for the elderly, widows, unmarried women and children, the thirty-two *Dinian* in the Royal Court of Tiébélé all have an outdoor altar dedicated to the spirits of the ancestors. The other domains in the compound are the houses of the young married people, which are quadrangular (*Mangolo*), those of the adolescent and unmarried men, which are circular (*Draa*), and grain stores, silos and poultry coops, which are conical in shape.

Other characteristic symbolic elements of the Royal Court of Tiébélé are located outside the compound. These include the *pourou*, the sacred tumulus where the placenta of the new-borns of the royal family are buried; the red fig tree marking the entrance to the Court, beneath which are placed the sacred stones (*dala*), on which sit the princes and dignitaries; the *nabari*, the tomb of the founder of the royal family; the *nankongo*, built against the enclosure of the Royal Court, and is used as a law court and place of parley; and lastly, the *bonnalé*, the cemetery of the Royal Court, located just inside the Court, forming a buffer space between the entrance gate and the domains.

The Royal Court is under the customary authority of the *Pé* (Chief). He is the guarantor of the social order and administers justice, the intermediary for dialogue with the ancestors and the Kasena divinities, and presides over offerings made on the altars of the ancestors.

The architecture of the Royal Court of Tiébélé is one of low earthen structures. The compound walls, enclosures and low walls, and the walls of the dwellings, are made of wet mud (*banco*), mixed with straw and cow dung, using the cob method (walls constructed using clods of earth piled on top of each other), with flat earthen terrace roofs supported by wooden beams, or conical thatched roofs. More recently, the adobe technique (sun-dried mudbrick), which makes building easier, has supplanted the cob method. The structures are made by the men, who traditionally carry out the construction work. The design and making of the decorations, paintings, engravings and low-reliefs, are reserved for the women of the Royal Court. They alone know the symbolic meaning of the decorative vocabulary, composing whole stories on the walls of the buildings, and masters of the knowhow required. It is they who have the task of perpetuating the spiritual and technical knowledge.

A woman from the Royal Court of Tiébélé was granted recognition in 2015 as a Living Human Treasure (LHT), which refers to the LHT programme implemented by UNESCO between 1993-2003 in an effort to encourage Member States to grant official recognition to those who embody traditions and to talented practitioners, and to ensure that their knowledge and knowhow are passed on to the younger generations.

The populations of the Tiébélé region are believed to have settled in this territory between the 11th and 15th centuries in successive waves of groups. Amongst them were the Kasena, who are thought to have settled there in the 15th century. During this period the Tiébélé region experienced upheaval caused by the slave trade and raids to capture slaves. During the 16th century, Tiébélé expanded greatly in terms of territory, and also in terms of political and spiritual development; the Royal Court became one of the main chiefdoms (*pa faru*) of the Kasena lands and extended its influence over a large number of villages. It was from this period that the use of earthen architecture and the practice of engraved and sculpted painted decoration became widespread in Kasena settlements, with the Royal Court of Tiébélé constituting one of the most outstanding examples. The villages were fortified in

the 19th century in an effort to protect against raids for the slave trade. In the period from the late 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, the Mossi kingdom of Ouagadougou became a French protectorate, and then the colony of Upper Volta. Colonisation by France led to an administrative and territorial reorganisation of the Kasena lands.

At that time, the colonial administration relied on the main chiefdoms to exercise its control over the population. The country achieved independence in 1960. Upper Volta, which was renamed as Burkina Faso in 1984, continues to recognise the legitimacy of the *pa faru* and the power exercised by the *Pé*, the ruler of Tiébélé.

In this section of the nomination dossier there is a lack of information, particularly with regard to the traditional social and political organisation of the Kasena people and its links with the architecture, and to the social, anthropological and symbolic dimensions of the mural decorations.

To enable a fuller understanding of the nominated property, ICOMOS therefore asked the State Party in October 2023 for greater detail in the description and inventory of the engravings and low-reliefs, and for information about their symbolic value and the techniques employed to produce these elements, which complement the painted decorations described in the nomination dossier. In November 2023, the State Party replied by proposing a brief inventory of the signs and symbols that recur in the mural decorations, particularly as regards the representation of fauna and objects, while stating that it is impossible to draw up a comprehensive inventory in view of the artistic character of the decorations, which are continually renewed. The State Party also gave details of the techniques used, namely painting, incised decoration and low-reliefs. The painting technique includes the preparation of the wall with a mixture of earth, cow dung and a decoction of African locust bean; the drawing of the motifs which involves the application of black graphite using the feathers of hens or guinea fowl; colouration involving patterns drawn in black on a reddish background which are then filled in with black and white; and the protection of the walls with a varnish made of a decoction of African locust bean pods which is then spattered on repeatedly using a brush. The incision technique consists of using pebbles to cut into the fresh coating, and then adding paint for decoration. Lastly, the low-reliefs are obtained by applying an additional layer of coating.

ICOMOS also asked the State Party to provide more detailed information about the traditional social and political organisation of the Court, bearing testimony to its royal status. In November 2023 the State Party replied, indicating that political organisation amongst the Kasena is closely bound up with the practice of the ancestor cult, and that the exercise of power is associated with the holding of a spiritual power that places its holder above the rest of the community. It stressed the importance of the *Kwara* as the major divinity amongst the Kasena.

In February 2024, the State Party provided a detailed table describing certain symbols used in the decorations, with their names in both the local language and in French, their illustrations and their significance. The motifs may be either ancient or new, and depend on the inspiration and creativity of the artist concerned.

The nominated property has a surface area of 1.84 ha and a buffer zone of 14.12 ha.

State of conservation

The Royal Court of Tiébélé is a living, dynamic cultural property which evolves according to the families who live in it. Although today some huts have fallen into disrepair, the great majority remain in good condition, and maintenance work is regularly carried out during the dry season, from January to May. All the symbolic attributes, that is the *pourou*, the red fig tree, the *dala*, the *nabari*, the *nankongo* and the *bonnalé*, are also in a good state of conservation and continue to be used today.

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of the nominated property is satisfactory.

Factors affecting the nominated property

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the main factors affecting the nominated property are development pressure, environmental threats and tourism.

The nominated property is facing urban development pressure. In 1989 a housing plot project affecting part of the Royal Court and its surrounding area was drawn up without making allowance for the historic plot plan. The opposition of the *Pé* and the community seems to have halted the project.

In a letter requesting additional information, ICOMOS asked in October 2023 for more details about the relationship between the nominated property and the surrounding landscape, and requested a cadastral plan. The State Party mentioned the housing plot scheme in its reply in November 2023, but without providing any clear answer about its current status, and informed ICOMOS that the preparation of the nomination dossier offered an opportunity to modify the old cadastral plan by marking on it the boundaries of the Royal Court. The cadastral plan was furthermore provided as an annex to the State Party's response. In its reply, the State Party also points out that the community has over a long period of time protected the traditional boundaries of the Royal Court by opposing any attempt to occupy this space by members from outside the Royal Court. In February 2024, the State Party indicated that the housing plot scheme takes into account the boundaries of the Royal Court of Tiébélé with regards to its palatial status.

The major threats that could affect the nominated property are heavy rainfall and high winds, to which may be added

run-off water, rising damp and humidity. Maintenance work is carried out after the rainy season to mitigate these effects, either by rehabilitating or repainting the huts.

Other threats include attacks by insects such as termites and pharaoh ants, which weaken walls and may result in huts collapsing.

Another important point is the increasing rarity of certain materials, such as the black pigment from graphite quarries which is used to decorate walls.

Whilst the Royal Court of Tiébélé has attracted significant numbers of visitors in the past, without however reaching mass tourism levels, a decline in visitor numbers has been observed, primarily because of public health and security issues.

ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation is satisfactory and that the factors affecting the nominated property are development pressure, environmental threats and tourism.

3 Proposed justification for inscription

Proposed justification

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

The architectural style of the Royal Court bears outstanding living testimony to the culture and traditions of the Kasena people through:

- The knowledge and knowhow associated with its construction and decoration;
- Its high degree of artistic achievement and its creativity;
- Its defensive architectural symbolism;
- The use of materials obtained from its immediate environment;
- The fact that it represents a site of conservation and dissemination of a resilient artistic and spiritual culture.

Based on the nomination dossier and the additional information, the main attributes of the nominated property are: architecture (an example of an earthen architectural complex); the sacred symbolic elements (*pourou*, red fig tree, *dala*, *nabari*, *nankongo* and *bonnalé*); and the associated practices and knowhow (decoration, ancestor cult).

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis has been developed on the themes of earthen architecture, palatial character, and decoration. It has examined properties in the country, in the sub-region, in the wider region and worldwide that are inscribed on the World Heritage List or included in the Tentative Lists of States Parties, and other properties.

As regards earthen architecture, reference is made to dwellings with a circular floor plan and a conical roof, and dwellings with an orthogonal plan and a flat mortared roof in several regions of the country. It is pointed out that the singularity of the architecture of the Royal Court of Tiébélé is expressed in the existence of quadrangular huts and atypical circular huts in a figure-of-eight shape, and in the combination of orthogonal huts with a flat terrace roof and circular huts with a thatched roof. Furthermore, it differs from other examples of earthen architecture in Africa in the expressive nature of the decorations. The particularity of its defensive nature, in contrast to other examples both in Africa and the rest of the world, is expressed in the fact that the Court is still inhabited today, thus affording it a living dimension.

As regards the palatial nature of the property, the nomination file mentions the existence in the past of several other examples of royal courts in Kasena lands, and other examples of palaces in Africa and worldwide, but indicates that the Royal Court of Tiébélé is the only one to have preserved its form and authenticity of function and usage, and the associated ancestral practices and knowhow.

Lastly, the particularity of Kasena decoration, compared with other examples in Africa and worldwide, lies according to the State Party in the fact that it embodies individual and collective knowhow applied over the entire surface of the outer walls, by combining several styles and processes which are passed on from mother to daughter and are continually renewed.

ICOMOS considers that this analysis is pertinent in that it draws comparisons with properties in the African geo-cultural area, as the specificity of the nominated property is to be found in similar properties that only exist in the Sahel and North African zones. These zones are identified as a specific region of the world.

The palaces of the Emirs in Nigeria (Emir of Daura and Emir of Zaria), the villages of the Songhais people, and the residences at Zinder in Niger, which have earthen low-relief decorations and painted decorations using a variety of pigments, could be added to strengthen this aspect of the comparative analysis.

Although the aspects relating to earthen architecture and decoration are relevant in confirming the specificities of the nominated property, ICOMOS considers that its defensive nature is not what makes Tiébélé an outstanding site, but rather its singularity and its specificity as a living site, its architecture with quadrangular/orthogonal huts with flat terrace roofs and circular figure-of-eight huts with thatched roofs, and its atypical decorative style, which make it stand out from all the other sites with which the nominated property has been compared.

ICOMOS notes that construction technique, spatial, social and functional distribution, and the role of men and women in the construction of the huts could have been taken into account in the comparative analysis in order to strengthen

the justification of the outstanding specificities of the nominated property.

ICOMOS considers that, despite the weaknesses mentioned above, the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated for inscription on the basis of cultural criteria (iv), (v) and (vi).

Criterion (iv): be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the Royal Court of Tiébélé is an architectural example bearing witness to a defensive system established from the 14th to the 19th century to deal with a range of threats, either in the context of territorial conquests or for protection against wild animals, and in particular “*man-eating lions*”. This is reflected in an architectural style close to that of a fortress, characterised by features such as the outer walls and particular types of openings.

While the Royal Court represents an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble, ICOMOS considers however that it does not constitute an outstanding illustration of one or more significant stages in human history either in terms of the African continent or of the rest of the world. Furthermore, the defensive nature of the architecture and the outstanding character claimed by the State Party are not sufficient to meet this criterion. ICOMOS considers that criterion (iv) has not been justified.

Criterion (v): be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the architecture of the Court results from a blend of mentefacts and artefacts in symbiosis with the environment and nature. This is characterised in particular by the use of natural materials, such as earth for the walls, wood for the structural framework, and the pigments used for the mural decorations.

ICOMOS considers that the use of natural materials is not sufficient to justify this criterion and that the particularities of Kasena culture and the outstanding nature of its representativity are not sufficiently demonstrated. ICOMOS considers that criterion (v) has not been justified.

Criterion (vi): *be directly or tangibly associated with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the Royal Court of Tiébélé is nationally and internationally renowned for its mural decorations, which reflect the outstanding knowhow of the Kasena women, who also play an important role in the transmission of the cultural heritage. The cult of ancestors and other traditional religious rites that are still practiced today are also mentioned to justify this criterion.

ICOMOS recognises the heritage value of the decorations applied to the buildings of the Royal Court of Tiébélé, which are all imbued with profound significance for the population and bear witness to specific knowledge which is transmitted from generation to generation by the women of the Court, but considers that these arguments are better justified by criterion (iii) than by criterion (vi).

Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared;*

Although the State Party did not propose this criterion, ICOMOS considers that, on the basis of the nomination dossier, and of the additional information provided by the State Party in November 2023 and February 2024, and in view of the arguments put forward by the State Party to justify criteria (iv), (v) and (vi), the nominated property is an outstanding representation of Kasena culture, of which the Royal Court of Tiébélé and the mural decorations are representative, and of the associated social, anthropological and political aspects. These characteristics, which are specific to the Royal Court of Tiébélé, bear outstanding and living testimony to the culture and traditions of the Kasena people, which have evolved over time, while preserving the identity and values of the Kasena.

The Royal Court is an outstanding example of an earthen architectural complex, which is distinctive in terms of its construction techniques, its spatial, social and functional distribution, the role of men and women in its construction, the plurality of its architectural forms, its decorative style and its specificity as a living site.

In October 2023, ICOMOS asked the State Party to provide details about the traditional social and political organisation of the Court. In November 2023, the State Party indicated that Kasena society is lineage-bonded with a diffuse power structure, having at its head a Chief whose succession passes from father to son, and whose royal attribute is represented by the *pourou*, which stands throne-like in front of the Court, and the sight of which indicates the Royal Court to the whole of the Kasena people, and the *nankongo*, the site and symbol of the customary tribunal presided over by the Chief. As the power structure is diffuse, the chiefs of other lineages living in districts of Tiébélé administer their courts autonomously but refer themselves to the Royal Court of Tiébélé for questions

relating to land, throne succession disputes, and other community conflicts.

Following the request made by ICOMOS in its intermediate report, the State Party gave details in February 2024 of the names and significance of certain symbols used in the decorations, and explained that the decorations are composed of both ancient and new motifs. This knowhow, with which are associated specific dances, songs, recipes, rituals and customs, is passed on from mother to daughter via observation and practice, and also by the organisation at regular intervals of ceremonies and competitions. The renovation of the mural decorations is ensured by an annual assessment of the state of deterioration of the decorations, and every two years by the renovation of the frontages.

ICOMOS has also asked the State Party to submit to it any existing documents or scientific studies on the subject of the ancestor cult or funeral practices at the Royal Court of Tiébélé so as to provide an insight into the spatial organisation of these functions, their status and their consequences for the arrangement of the dedicated spaces in the Royal Court. In February 2024, the State Party provided a detailed list of books on the subjects of the ancestor cult or funeral practices in the Court.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets cultural criterion (iii), but that criteria (iv), (v) and (vi) have not been demonstrated.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The integrity of the nominated property is based on the ensemble of concessionary structures and on the symbolic elements located at the entrance and inside the Court. These attributes, which are meaningful for the community, have been preserved in their entirety and continue to be used today. The Royal Court has retained its original site and has remained to the present day protected from urban development by its immediate surroundings, which are still predominantly natural.

The integrity of the Royal Court of Tiébélé continues to be threatened by a lack of maintenance, or even the ruin of certain concessions, and the use of materials and chemicals that have a negative impact on the integrity of the nominated property. Furthermore, during the maintenance of the concessions, and alterations made to them, poor construction techniques sometimes result in problems of rising damp, erosion and water drainage.

Lastly, hut construction techniques are changing, with in particular the use of the adobe technique, the making of cement bricks foundations and the use of tar-based paint coatings; if these practices become widespread, they could have an adverse effect on the integrity of the nominated property.

ICOMOS considers that the architectural complex of the Royal Court of Tiébélé has conserved its integrity, in terms of architectural form, construction techniques and the associated functions and uses, but that this integrity remains threatened by a lack of maintenance, and by the use of new construction techniques and materials.

In response to the ICOMOS intermediate report, the State Party confirmed in February 2024 that the boundaries of the nominated property take into account all the attributes.

Authenticity

The Royal Court of Tiébélé has succeeded in preserving its authenticity with regard to conservation and evolution of traditional practices, not only in terms of construction methods and the specific architecture of the Kasena culture and way of life, but also in the social distribution of construction and decoration tasks.

With regard to the information provided by the State Party in February 2024 as to the existence of ancient and new motifs in the repertory used by the artists, ICOMOS considers that it is important to put in place a system that ensures the preservation of ancient motifs whilst facilitating their evolution, as this contributes to the living character of the nominated property and of the practices and knowhow associated with its architecture.

The development of the use of new materials, such as cement, corrugated sheet metal, metal windows, and tar or other chemicals to replace the natural pigments used for the mural decorations, could adversely affect the authenticity of the nominated property.

Two concessions have been rebuilt using cement agglomerate, with corrugated sheet metal roofing and metal joinery, in an architectural style which differs from the traditional typology of Kasena concessions.

Following the request made by ICOMOS concerning the specific materials historically used in the construction of the huts, and changes in the techniques of application of traditional materials and the possible existence of an inventory of sites from which traditional materials are supplied, the State Party gave details, in February 2024, of the materials traditionally used, i.e. *banco* (fermented mud), straw, wood, shea butter residues and cow dung, specifying how they are used and the different construction stages. The manually formed rolls of *banco* traditionally used for foundations and walls are today being replaced by stones, granite blocks, cement bricks or adobe bricks for foundations, and by adobe bricks for walls. The entrance, originally low, semi-circular and covered by a mat of straw or a door of wood, has been replaced by a large quadrangular door made of sheet metal and wood. The State Party explained that the remains of huts fallen into disrepair are reused to build new huts, and that sites close to the huts are used to make mud bricks, but without indicating the precise location from which all the materials are supplied, nor the conditions with regard to accessibility and availability.

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of authenticity are met but it is advisable to control the evolution of motifs and of construction techniques and the use of new materials so as not to adversely affect the authenticity of the nominated property, while taking care to maintain its evolving and living character.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the nominated property have been met, but that they continue to be threatened by a lack of maintenance, the evolution of construction techniques and the use of new materials.

Boundaries

The population of the nominated property is today estimated at 443 inhabitants, with 213 inhabitants in the buffer zone.

The boundaries of the nominated property seem to extend beyond the built-up compound of the Royal Court of Tiébélé. However, little information is provided in the nomination file about the reasons why the boundary for the nominated property and its buffer zone has been drawn in this way. A housing plot project drawn up in 1989 encroaches on part of the Royal Court without allowing for the boundaries of the Court and its buffer zone.

Furthermore, the management plan indicates the existence of annex sites associated with the Royal Court, which are in fact sacrifice sites assigned to specific families, that lie outside the boundaries of the nominated property and its buffer zone.

In response to the ICOMOS intermediate report, the State Party made a clarification in February 2024 indicating that the boundaries of the nominated property take into account the attributes of the Royal Court, and that the boundary of the buffer zone has been revised with the participation of the local community. The buffer zone boundary corresponds to the pre-colonial boundaries of the Royal Court and has been made visible by boundary markers installed by the Ministry for Urban Planning.

Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for inscription on the World Heritage List. ICOMOS considers that criteria (iv), (v) and (vi) are not justified, but that criterion (iii) is demonstrated. The conditions of integrity and authenticity have been demonstrated, but it is important to control the evolution of construction techniques and the use of new materials so as not to adversely affect the authenticity of the nominated property. The boundaries of the nominated property and its buffer zone have been justified.

4 Conservation measures and monitoring

Documentation

Most of the documentation on the Royal Court of Tiébélé is preserved at Ouagadougou in the Ministry of Communication, Culture, Art and Tourism and in the library of the Laboratory of Archaeology and History of Art and Techniques (LAHAT) at the Université Joseph Ki-Zerbo. It comprises a digitalised inventory, a photographic data base, sound archives, mission reports, digitised research work and cartography. Furthermore, the Royal Court has been the subject of several national and international scientific works and audiovisual documentaries.

Conservation measures

A conservation and management plan was drawn up in 2021, covering the period 2022-2026. The document is divided into three parts comprising a description of the nominated property, elements of strategy and the action plan. It sets out the challenges to be met, with regard to the strengthening of conservation and protection, knowledge and valorisation of the site, and human, material and financial capacities. The strategy is based upon four objectives: improving the governance of the Royal Court of Tiébélé, strengthening its conservation and protection, developing research on the site, and strengthening the valorisation of the site for tourism.

The document also defines the financing mechanism, indicating the stakeholders involved and proposing a financing plan enabling an estimate of the budget allocated per year for each of the strategic objectives identified. However, it does not specify the existence, nor the amount, of the funds already available.

Two bodies have been set up to implement the plan: a local committee responsible for implementing the plan through conservation actions for the nominated property, and a scientific committee whose task is to carry out specific studies of the nominated property.

The conservation and management plan also proposes a monitoring and evaluation scheme based on the periodic collection of data, and analysis of the data, which are then compiled in half-yearly and annual reports.

Monitoring

Key indicators have been established to measure the state of conservation of the Royal Court. They are grouped together on the basis of four objectives: conservation and protection, enhancing attractiveness, research, and cooperation. The setting up of the local and scientific committees mentioned above will also enable the monitoring of the state of conservation of the nominated property.

However, more detail should be provided concerning the provisions of the management plan aimed at ensuring the monitoring of its implementation, and more specifically the roles, responsibilities and modes of operation of the local committee and the scientific committee in this respect. The monitoring indicators must take into account all the

attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value in order to deal adequately with the threats to the conditions of authenticity of the nominated property, particularly with regards to the use of new materials as opposed to traditional materials, and the transmission of the knowhow relating to the mural decorations.

ICOMOS considers that the measures taken for the conservation and monitoring of the property are satisfactory. ICOMOS recommends that the roles, responsibilities and modes of operation of the local committee and the scientific committee be clearly stated to ensure the monitoring of implementation of the management and conservation plan. ICOMOS considers that it would be advisable that the monitoring system is further developed to encompass all the attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value and is adapted for easy integration of its outcomes into the Periodic Report questionnaire.

5 Protection and management

Legal protection

At an institutional level, the Royal Court of Tiébélé is under the administrative supervision of the General Directorate of Culture and Art, in conjunction with the decentralised departments of the Regional Directorate of Communication, Culture, Art and Tourism (DRCCAT) and the Provincial Directorate of Culture, Art and Tourism (DPCAT), as well as with the department of the local municipality responsible for cultural affairs.

The texts that specifically cover the legal protection of the nominated property include Law 024-2007/AN of 13 November 2007 for the protection of the cultural heritage of Burkina Faso and Decree n°2014-1019/PRES/PM/MCT/MEDD/MATS/MATDS of 28 October 2014 for the classification of cultural and natural properties and their inscription on the Tentative List of the heritage of Burkina Faso, together with the Orders relating to the creation, attributions, composition and functioning of the scientific committee and the local management committee of the Royal Court of Tiébélé.

The intangible dimension of the Court is taken into account by the Order n°2015-0338/MCT/SG of 23 December 2015 for the proclamation of the Living Human Treasures of Burkina Faso.

Law n°014/96/ADP of 23 May 1996 for agricultural and land reorganisation in Burkina Faso (RAF) allows the community to dispose of its domain, that is the whole of the Court and a large proportion of the buffer zone, which is a property owned by the *Pé*.

Management system

The management of the Royal Court of Tiébélé is traditionally the task of the *Pé* and of the community, which is organised through cultural associations and groups (in particular the builders' group and the women's group) to support the protection and management of the nominated property.

A conservation and management plan for 2022-2026 was validated in 2021 and is based on coordination of the stakeholders through the local management committee. Its vision for the years up to 2026 is expressed as follows: *"The attributes of the Royal Court of Tiébélé better preserved in symbiosis with its environment, improved knowledge of its cultural and scientific potential, the practices of Kasena culture in the fields of architecture and mural decoration passed on to young people, and its attractiveness strengthened, thus contributing to local development."*

In November 2023 the State Party informed ICOMOS of the creation in 2023 of the Department of National Monuments, whose main brief is to administer major cultural properties (including those inscribed on the World Heritage List) and of the appointment of a Head of the Department of National Monuments. It was stated that this process is continuing, with the upcoming appointment of site managers, including a Royal Court of Tiébélé site manager, who has already been identified. ICOMOS considers that it is urgent to finalise the Royal Court of Tiébélé site manager appointment process to ensure that the management system functions effectively.

In response to the ICOMOS intermediate report, the State Party declared in February 2024 that proposals concerning the realisation of tourism developments inside the buffer zone have been discussed, but that no specific project is envisioned at the moment.

The State Party also informed ICOMOS in February 2024 that, in addition to the routine maintenance carried out by the local community, risk prevention is governed nationwide by the National Five-Year Strategy for the prevention and management of humanitarian crises and disasters.

In its intermediate report, ICOMOS asked the State Party for clarifications concerning the impact of future land use and development projects, as well as the use of Heritage Impact Assessments. In February 2024, the State Party pointed out that the Law for the Protection, Preservation and Valorisation of the cultural heritage in Burkina Faso stipulates, in Article 59, that *"For any development project that could affect cultural heritage properties or archaeological remains, the body in charge of the project has recourse to preventive archaeology or to a cultural impact assessment, or to both."*

ICOMOS considers that issues relating to risk management and the impact of ongoing or future land use and development projects should be addressed in the management plan.

Visitor management

While the number of visitors has declined considerably as a result of the public health and security crises that have affected the region, the nominated property nevertheless has a number of visitor reception facilities and infrastructures. In particular, roads have been built for access to the site, signage has been installed, and accommodation has been put in place not far from the boundaries of the nominated property. Discussions are underway concerning the setting up of infrastructure to house the centre of interpretation for traditional Kasena architecture.

ICOMOS considers that the drawing up of a sustainable tourism strategy as part of the management plan is essential to ensure satisfactory conservation and management of the nominated property.

Community involvement

The communities contribute fully to the living character of the Royal Court and its preservation. According to the information provided in the nomination file and that received by ICOMOS during the evaluation procedure, the communities were involved in the process prior to the drawing up of the Tentative List, and were informed, consulted and invited to collaborate in the preparation of the nomination dossier.

Effectiveness of the protection and management of the nominated property

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the protection and management system for the nominated property is satisfactory. To further strengthen the system, ICOMOS recommends that it should incorporate the existence and potential impact of all land use and development projects that are ongoing (for example, the housing plot scheme of 1989) or may arise in the future, and recommends recourse to Heritage Impact Assessments, risk management and the monitoring of the implementation of the conservation plan by defining the roles, responsibilities and modes of operation of the local committee and the scientific committee. It is important to ensure the effective implementation of the conservation and management plan by involving all the stakeholders and by designating a manager for the Royal Court.

6 Conclusion

The Royal Court of Tiébélé is an outstanding example of an earthen architectural complex that is representative of the Kasena culture established in an area extending from northern Ghana to southern Burkina Faso.

ICOMOS welcomes the intention of the State Party of Burkina Faso to nominate the Royal Court of Tiébélé for inscription on the World Heritage List. The nomination dossier clearly demonstrates the commitment of the State Party and of the local community to the conservation of this nominated property.

ICOMOS considers that the Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property has been justified with regard to its characteristic architecture, symbolic sacred elements (*pourou*, red fig tree, *dala*, *nabari*, *nankongo* and *bonnalè*), and to the associated practices and knowhow (decoration, ancestor cult). These attributes contribute to the outstanding and living character of the nominated property.

ICOMOS considers that criteria (iv), (v) and (vi), on the basis of which inscription is proposed, are not justified, but that criterion (iii) is justified, highlighting the Kasena culture whose Royal Court architecture is representative, and the associated social, anthropological and political aspects.

The integrity and authenticity of the nominated property have been demonstrated, and the boundaries proposed for the Royal Court of Tiébélé and its buffer zone have been justified.

Nevertheless, it is important that the State Party should take care to control the evolution of motifs, techniques and construction materials so as not to adversely affect the integrity and authenticity of the nominated property, while ensuring that the evolving and living character of the decorations, which also contributes to the richness of the Royal Court, is maintained.

Lastly, ICOMOS considers that the measures taken for conservation and management, and particularly for their monitoring, need to be set out in detail in the management and conservation plan as regards the existence and potential impact of land use and development projects that are ongoing (for example, the housing plot project of 1989) or may arise in the future, and the recourse to Heritage Impact Assessments, risk management, and the monitoring of the implementation of the conservation plan by defining the roles, responsibilities and modes of operation of the local committee and the scientific committee. It is also a matter of urgency to finalise the process of appointing the Royal Court site manager to ensure the effective functioning of the management system.

7 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the Royal Court of Tiébélé, Burkina Faso, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criterion (iii)**.

Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief description

Established since the 16th century at the foot of the hill of Tchébili, 172 km south of the capital Ouagadougou and approximately fifteen kilometres north of the border with Ghana, the Royal Court of Tiébélé is an earthen architectural complex that bears testimony to the social organisation and cultural values of the Kasena people.

Its specific architecture, which combines earth, wood, cow dung and straw, is arranged according to a social and spatial distribution inside the Court based on the status of the inhabitants. A distinction is drawn between the mother houses or *Dinian*, the foundational structures of the domain, with a figure-of-eight floor plan, reserved for the elderly, widows, unmarried women and children; the houses of the young married people, which are quadrangular (*Mangolo*); and the houses of the adolescent and unmarried men, which are circular (*Draa*).

In addition to the houses, there are symbolic sacred elements: the *pourou*, the sacred tumulus where the placenta of the new-borns of the royal family are buried; the red fig tree marking the entrance to the Court, beneath which are placed the sacred stones (*dala*), on which sit the princes and dignitaries; the *nabari*, the tomb of the founder of the royal family; the *nankongo*, which is used as a law court and place of parley; and the *bonnalè*, the cemetery of the Royal Court. These elements bear eloquent testimony to the preservation of traditional practices specific to Kasena culture.

The Court is also the embodiment of practices and knowhow which help to make it an evolving and living site. The practice of mural decoration, exclusively reserved to the women of the Court, is subject to a repertory of motifs that are both ancient and constantly renewed, and passed on from generation to generation by observation and practice, and by the organisation of ceremonies and competitions. The ritual practices that are fundamental to the ancestor cult and the funeral rites are an integral part of the spiritual and temporal rituals that are specific to Kasena culture, under the authority of the *Pê*.

Criterion (iii): The Royal Court of Tiébélé is an outstanding example of an earthen architectural complex, which is distinctive in terms of its construction techniques, its spatial, social and functional distribution, the role of men and women in its construction, the plurality of its architectural forms, its decorative style and its specificity as a living site.

It is an outstanding illustration of Kasena culture, of which the Royal Court architecture and mural decorations are representative, and of the associated social, anthropological and political aspects. These characteristics bear outstanding and living testimony to the culture and traditions of the Kasena people, which have evolved over time while preserving the identity and values of the Kasena people.

Integrity

The integrity of the Royal Court of Tiébélé is based on the set of concession huts and on the sacred symbolic elements that continue to be used today. The Royal Court has retained its original site and has been preserved from urban development up to the present day by its immediate surroundings, which are still predominantly natural. The property embodies all the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value.

However, integrity continues to be threatened by a lack of maintenance, or even the ruin of certain concessions, and the use of new materials and chemicals. Furthermore, the maintenance of the concessions and their alterations lead sometimes to construction malpractices that cause problems of rising damp, erosion and water drainage.

Lastly, hut construction techniques are changing, particularly with the use of the adobe technique, the making of cement brick foundations and the use of tar-based paint coatings; if these practices become widespread, they could adversely affect the integrity of the property.

Authenticity

The Royal Court of Tiébélé has successfully preserved its authenticity with regards to the conservation or evolution of traditional practices, both as concerns construction methods and the architecture that is specific to the Kasena culture and way of life, which includes the social distribution of tasks of construction and decoration.

It is however important to put in place a system that ensures the preservation of ancient motifs, while enabling evolution through the creation of new motifs, thereby strengthening the living character of the property and of the practices and knowhow associated with its architecture.

The development of the use of new materials, such as cement, corrugated sheet metal, metal windows and tar and other chemicals to replace the natural pigments used for the mural decorations, could adversely affect the authenticity of the property.

Protection and management requirements

The Royal Court of Tiébélé is under the administrative supervision of the General Directorate of Culture and Art. The Court is legally protected by the Law 024-2007/AN of 13 November 2007 for the protection of the cultural heritage of Burkina Faso and Decree n°2014-1019/PRES/PM/MCT/MEDD/MATS/MATDS of 28 October 2014 for the

classification of cultural and natural properties and their inscription on the Tentative List of the heritage of Burkina Faso. Law n°014/96/ADP of 23 May 1996 for agricultural and land reorganisation in Burkina Faso (RAF) allows the community to dispose of its domain, that is the whole of the Court and a large proportion of the buffer zone, which is a property owned by the *Pé*. The intangible dimension of the Court is taken into account by the Order n° 2015-0338/MCT/SG of 23 December 2015 for the proclamation of the Living Human Treasures of Burkina Faso.

The management of the Royal Court of Tiébélé is traditionally the task of the *Pé* (the customary Chief) and of the community.

A conservation and management plan for 2022-2026 was validated in 2021. Two bodies have been set up to implement the plan: a local committee responsible for implementing the plan through conservation actions for the property, and a scientific committee whose task is to carry out specific studies of the property.

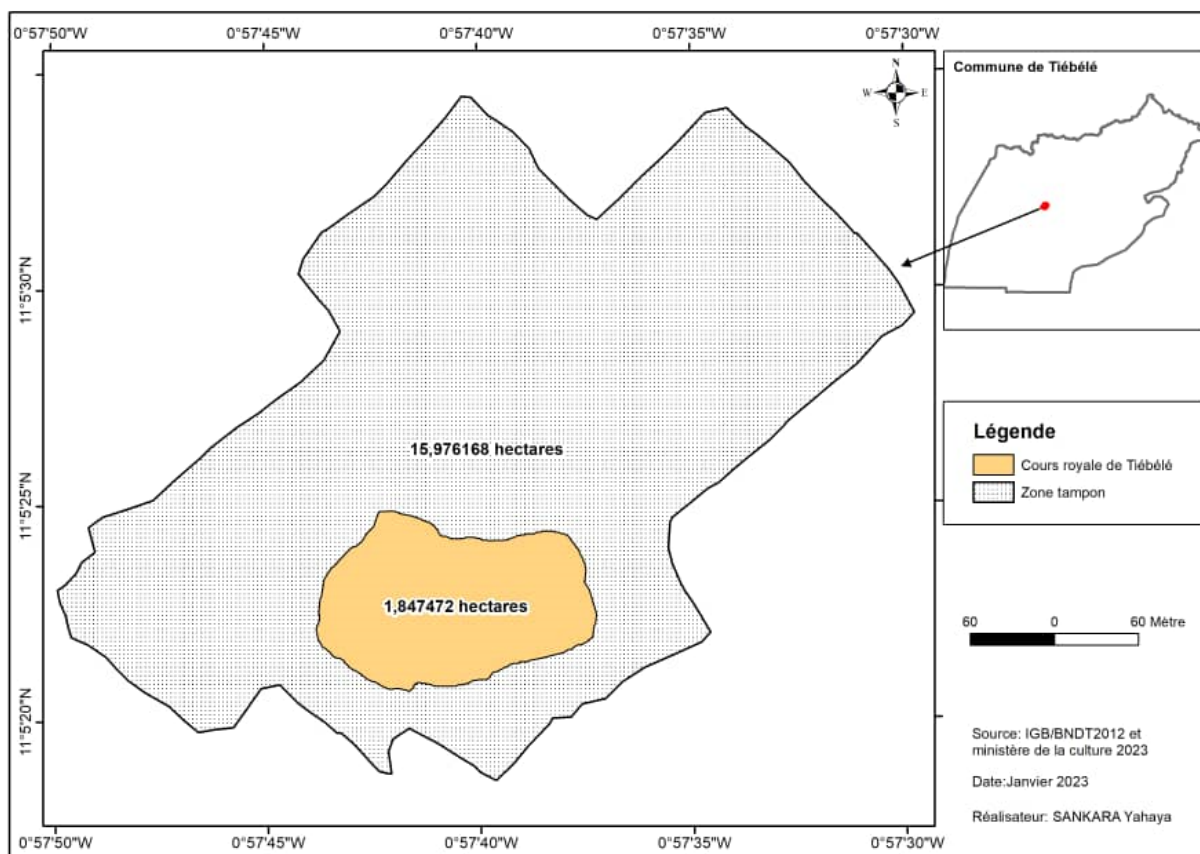
The protection and management plan will be strengthened by the incorporation in the management and conservation plan of the existence and potential impacts of land use and development projects that are ongoing or that may arise in the future, the recourse to Heritage Impact Assessments, risk management and monitoring of the implementation of the conservation plan, while defining the roles, responsibilities and modes of operation of the local committee and the scientific committee.

Additional recommendations

ICOMOS recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following points:

- a) Putting in place a system to ensure the preservation of ancient motifs while facilitating the development of new motifs,
- b) Controlling the use of new techniques and new construction materials,
- c) Developing sites to ensure the sustainable supply of traditional materials, for example by the planting of species of plants that are appropriate with regards to the use of wood,
- d) Finalising the site manager appointment process,
- e) Providing details of the management and conservation plan as regards the existence and the potential impacts of land use and development projects that are either ongoing or may arise in the future, and as regards the recourse to Heritage Impact Assessments, risk management and monitoring of the implementation of the conservation plan by defining the roles, responsibilities and modes of operation of the local committee and scientific committee,

- f) Developing a sustainable tourism strategy as part of the management plan,
- g) Developing the monitoring system to take into account all the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value so as to adequately deal with the threats to the conditions of authenticity of the property,
- h) Informing the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies of any development project inside the boundaries of the property or its buffer zone, including the installation of the Kasena traditional architecture interpretation centre and any tourism developments inside the buffer zone,
- i) Submitting to the World Heritage Centre by 1 December 2025 a report on the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 48th session in 2026.



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property