

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL
ET LA CULTURE

Date received : 14.5.79
Identification No. : 119
Original : French

Convention concerning the protection
of the world cultural and natural heritage

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Nomination submitted by
the Republic of Mali

Town of Timbuktu

1. Specific location

- a) Country Republic of Mali
- b) State, Province or region 6th region
- c) Name of property Town of Timbuktu
- d) Exact location on map and indication of geographical co-ordinates
Lat. 16° 45' N.
Long. 3° 04' W.

2. Juridical data

- a) Owner Property of its inhabitants and the State of Mali
- b) Legal status As above.
- c) Responsible administration Town Council

3. Identification

- a) Description and inventory
Timbuktu is a commune with a population of approximately 22,000 and the chief town of the 6th administrative region of Mali. It possesses many historical monuments:
- famous mosques: Djingereyber, Sidi Yahia and Sankorey
 - tombs of saints
 - houses of the explorers: R. Caillié, H. Barth, G. Laing and Berky
 - famous places: Badjandé Market; Koy Fatouma or Independence Square (formerly Place Joffre), with the monument to the horseman "El Farouk" in the centre; the port of Kabara linked to the river by a 2-mile long canal.
- b) Maps and/or plans See: Touré, Y.M.A., doctoral thesis "Tombouctou et sa région", Paris 1970.

3. Identification (cont'd)

c) Photographic and/or cinematographic documentation

- Photographs of the various monuments, Commissariat au Tourisme (Tourist Board), Bamako, Mali.

- films: La quinzaine touristique à Tombouctou, ORTF, Paris

d) History

"Salt comes from the north, gold from the south and silver from the white man's country; but the word of God, learning, stories and pretty tales are only to be found in Timbuktu". So runs a fifteenth-century Sudanic saying.

Timbuktu was both the gateway to the desert and also on the edge of the Sudanic fertile area. The proximity of the Niger made it an excellent trading centre.

About 1300 it became a little town of a few thousand souls where cattle and grain were traded and salt from Taghaza bought. Lying at the junction of a great west-east waterway and the overland routes to the north, it aroused everyone's cupidity, and often fell a prey to the rapacity of its neighbours. Thus, having prospered under the Tuareg, its founders, it came in turn under the sway of the Mandingo (1325-1435), the Tuareg again (1435-1468), the Songhay (1468-1591), the Moroccans (1591-1618), the Fulani (1826-1860), the Tukulor (1860-1893) and the French (1893-1960).

In the sixteenth century Timbuktu was a centre of Islamic culture, the main focus of this flowering being the University of Sankorey. The capital of the Sudan was a town of more than 100,000 souls. The Ta'rikh as-Sūdān tells us that it included among other things 25 embroidery workshops with 50 to 100 apprentices and 180 Koran schools with 25,000 pupils.

Nowadays, the city has lost much of its economic and cultural importance; but it still has its prestige, and its appeal for people nurtured on history and legend. It is still a land of the Baraka and the home of a certain North-Sudanic humanism.

3. Identification (cont'd)

e) Bibliography

- Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh: French translation by O. Houdas and M. Delafosse, Paris (A. Maisonneuve) 1964.
- Ta'rīkh as-Sūdān: Trans. Houdas, (A. Maisonneuve), Paris 1964.
- Tadhkirat an-Nisyan: Trans. Houdas, Paris (A. Maisonneuve), 1966.
- Mali State Information and Tourism Department, Connaissance de la République du Mali.
- Touré Y.M.A., Tombouctou et sa région. (doctoral thesis), Paris 1970.

4. State of preservation/
conservation

a) Diagnosis

By and large the city has kept much of its traditional character, both as regards architectural style and building materials used. But the ancient monuments are not standing up well to the test of time, and a restoration programme would be welcome at the present time. The great squares are increasingly threatened by development. At present the only examples of modern architecture in the town are the supermarket and the camping-hotel.

b) Agent responsible
for preservation/
conservation

The Regional Officer for the cultural heritage in Timbuktu.

c) History of
preservation/
conservation

- Timbuktu was declared a historical site under Law 4179 of 16.12.1954 by the Governor-General of French West Africa.
- Public monuments are kept up by the Town Council, whereas the maintenance of religious and private monuments is the responsibility of the authorities concerned.

4. State of preservation/
conservation (cont'd)

d) Means for preservation/conservation - As a historical site, Timbuktu is subject to legislation dating back to the colonial era;

- New legislation is being drafted.

e) Management plans

- As part of the commemoration of the fifteenth centenary of the Hijra, steps are to be taken to see to the Islamic religious monuments.

- The Sites and Monuments Section has included a major restoration scheme in its five-year programme.

5. Justification for
inclusion in the
World Heritage List

a) Cultural property

The town deserves to be added to the List for the following reasons:

- 1) Timbuktu is one of the towns in the world whose name is charged with history. For a West African, Timbuktu is rather what Rome or Athens is to a Mediterranean, or what Constantinople, Baghdad, Jerusalem or Mecca is to someone from the Near East. Together with Jenné and Gao, it is one of the few towns that have witnessed the great vicissitudes of the region's history.
- 2) The town has in the past had a great fascination for people in distant lands, and it still does today, as witness the ever-increasing number of tourists who flock to it each year.
- 3) Moreover, while Timbuktu is the northern counterpart of Jenné as regards architectural style, it is distinctive for the building materials used: "Alhor" stone, of which most of the houses are built, combines hardness with lightness and beauty.
- 4) It has a large concentration of historical remains (see History, 3.d.).