



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Intangible  
Cultural  
Heritage

**CONVENTION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF  
THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE FOR THE  
SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**Fourth session  
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates  
28 September to 2 October 2009**

**Nomination for inscription on the Representative List in 2009 (Reference No. 00251)**

**A.** STATE PARTY: **France**

**B.** NAME OF ELEMENT: The scribing tradition in French timber framing

**C.** COMMUNITY(IES), GROUP(S) OR, IF APPLICABLE, INDIVIDUAL(S) CONCERNED:  
French professional carpenters

**D.** BRIEF TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION OF THE NOMINATED ELEMENT:  
The scribe tradition in French timber framing, or the “trait de charpente” as the carpenters call it, makes it possible to design complex wooden buildings in three dimensions. To understand this system is to master the perception of the volume of buildings and, thereby, possess an essential quality in the art of building. The mastery of the French scribe system is therefore accompanied by powerful symbolic and social practices that play a crucial role in the characteristic representations of the *compagnonnages* or trade guilds. Knowledge of it enables one, metaphorically speaking, to know exactly how to behave in the universe and society. The art of scribing is a discipline specific to France, with related practices to be found only in Japan and Germany. Since the Middle Ages, it has made possible the construction of the greatest French monuments. It also makes possible a social and professional achievement that is accessible to all, including young people from the underprivileged sections of society. Furthermore, it contributes to intercultural and international dialogue.

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| <p><b>1.</b> IDENTIFICATION OF THE ELEMENT</p>  |
| <p><b>1.a.</b> NAME OF ELEMENT: The scribing tradition in French timber framing</p>   |
| <p><b>1.b.</b> OTHER NAME(S) OF THE ELEMENT, IF ANY:<br/>Practical art of carpentry tracing – the “trait de charpente”.</p>   |
| <p><b>1.c.</b> IDENTIFICATION OF THE COMMUNITY(IES), GROUP(S) OR, IF APPLICABLE, INDIVIDUAL(S) CONCERNED AND THEIR LOCATION:<br/>French professional carpenters. The carpenters who are members of the <i>sociétés de Compagnonnage</i> (trade guilds) attach profound symbolic and initiatory value to the French Scribe method.</p>   |
| <p><b>1.d.</b> GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION AND RANGE OF THE ELEMENT:<br/>Throughout France, training centres, <i>maisons compagnonniques</i> or guild houses, and firms use the French scribing method on a more or less daily basis. They maintain a strong presence in Normandy because of a strong tradition of wooden construction and the historic role played by a theoretician of the “trait du charpente”, Nicolas Fourneau, the author of a famous eighteenth-century treatise. The instruction on scribing given there is well known, in particular at the building trades regional training centre (CEREF BTP) in Bourgheroulde and centres of the <i>Association Ouvrière des Compagnons du Devoir</i> (Workers’ Association of the Companions of Duty).<br/>Evaluation of the training centres: the <i>Fédération Compagnonnique des Métiers du Bâtiment</i> (Federation of the Companions of the Building Trade) has 25 training centres in France (see <a href="http://www.compagnons.org">www.compagnons.org</a>). The <i>Association ouvrière des Compagnons du Devoir du Tour de France</i> covers 65 towns with training for young carpenters, and an <i>Institut supérieur de la Charpente et de la construction bois</i> (Higher Institute for Timber Framing and Construction) in Angers (see <a href="http://www.compagnons-du-devoir.com">http://www.compagnons-du-devoir.com</a>). The <i>Union compagnonnique</i> (Companions Union) has 25 local sections (see <a href="http://www.lecompagnonnage.com">www.lecompagnonnage.com</a>). It is impossible to determine the number of active professionals using and giving instruction on scribing as compared to the numerous carpentry firms in which it is not practised at all.</p> |
| <p><b>1.e.</b> DOMAIN(S) REPRESENTED BY THE ELEMENT:<br/>Traditional building skills.</p>   |
| <p><b>2.</b> DESCRIPTION OF THE ELEMENT (CF. CRITERION R.1):</p>  |
| <p>The contemporary world of building is dominated by standardization and mechanization that are transforming builders into mere labourers devoid of any creative thinking. But France has a tradition that is alive and well, although not given sufficient prominence, which allows men and women builders to retain full mastery of the intellectual and technical aspects of designing volume and space. This skill also enables the coupling of highly sophisticated technical thinking and practice, amounting to a true vision of human beings as masters of their own destiny.</p> <p>It is difficult to determine the origin of this technical and symbolic tradition. It is the subject of founding myths cultivated by the trade guilds, which date the mastery of scribing back to founders such as Solomon, Maître Jacques (master stonemason) and Père Soubise (master carpenter).</p> <p>Be that as it may, the first concrete signs of scribing in French timber framing were observed during the Middle Ages. Scribing, which was linked to the expansion of medieval monasteries, developed in close correlation to the building of Gothic monuments.</p> <p>The French scribing system brings together the different graphic possibilities in use in</p>   |

France since the thirteenth century to express, with drawings of the greatest possible precision, the reality of a building's volumes, how they fit together and the characteristics of the pieces of timber that frame them. It is taught in its own specific way, quite distinct from architectural theory and practice. Using this procedure during the prefabrication phase, the carpenter can identify on the ground all the constituent pieces, irrespective of their complexity, and can thus be sure that when the frame is assembled, even the most complex and voluminous elements will fall perfectly into place.

French scribing is not only a skill. It plays an important symbolic role in the initiation and value system of the companions of the *Tour de France* (that is, the journeymen companions). The successive rites of passage (novice, journeyman, confirmed journeyman) of the carpenters make metaphorical use of aspects borrowed from the field of scribing. More than a technical discipline, scribing represents the gold standard of a veritable vision of the world that is specific to the world of the guild, passing on its values.

'It is called the art of scribing, and in the word "art" there is something that invokes the mind. This characteristic of the French scribing method is based on a line of axis and a level line which symbolizes the earth, having one's feet on the ground. The line of axis means to be upstanding. These two axes constitute the underlying principle of the art of scribing. Rotations are made of the plain figures in order to obtain life-size values. Geometry is the touchstone of precision and reality. It is possible to divide a circle into seven equal parts using a compass, which could never be done in mathematics with figures as there is always something after the decimal point, but not after the compass. Scribing affords immediate real-life access to the volumes and the thicknesses of the timber. Unlike descriptive geometry with its simple lines, the process here concerns the assembling of pieces of wood that have sections and lengths that must be adapted to their intended use' (Jean Louis Valentin, *Compagnon Charpentier du Devoir du Tour de France*).

Learning the French scribing system is open to all, with certificates and diplomas awarded under the national education system (vocational training certificate (CAP) and occupational certification (BP)). Levels of excellence are attained in competitive examinations such as the *Meilleur ouvrier de France* (Best Tradesperson in France), the *Meilleur apprenti de France* (Best Apprentice in France), and the *Olympiades des metiers* (Trade Olympics).

The French scribing method continues to be transmitted and even to evolve, thanks to the recent improvements made in contemporary timber framing techniques.

**3. CONTRIBUTION TO ENSURING VISIBILITY AND AWARENESS AND TO ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE (CF. CRITERION R.2):**

The inclusion of the French scribing method on the Representative List will help the general public as well as the authorities recognize the value of a community that is not fully appreciated, that of professional builders. The building trade is a potentially powerful means for young people in difficulty to obtain a qualification and become integrated into society.

Moreover, the exchanges taking place with foreign countries concerning timber vocations could benefit from this prestigious label when linked with French skills. The young French carpenters, who would enjoy better national and international reputations, will thus reap rich rewards in exchanges with other countries. For example, two instructors in the French scribing system from the CEREF BTP of Bourgtheroulde in Haute Normandie were invited in 2008 by the DACAPO School in Sweden to initiate young Swedes to their practices.

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| <b>4.</b>   | <b>SAFEGUARDING MEASURES (CF. CRITERION R.3)</b>  |
| <b>4.a.</b> | <p><b>CURRENT AND RECENT EFFORTS TO SAFEGUARD THE ELEMENT:</b><br/> The art of scribing is alive and well in France, with instruction being given in various training centres and <i>Maisons de Compagnons</i> (Journeymen Houses) and it is still part of the training system guaranteed by the national education system. However, with the recent impressive growth in digitally-controlled machines that are gradually being adopted by businessmen, it is to be feared that in about 10 years, instruction in scribing will have vanished from the technical culture of timber framers, replaced by machines.</p>  |
| <b>4.b.</b> | <p><b>SAFEGUARDING MEASURES PROPOSED:</b><br/> The maintenance of scribing programmes in the repertoires of the French Ministry of Education. The organization of cultural events and communication dealing with the French scribing method (exhibitions, open days on institutions, public demonstrations, hosting foreign trainees, publications, films, television documentaries).</p>   |
| <b>4.c.</b> | <p><b>COMMITMENTS OF STATES AND OF COMMUNITIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONCERNED:</b><br/> The French scribing system is included in the Ministry of Education's system of reference for training with a view to obtaining vocational certificates and diplomas (CAP and BTS) for carpenters. The various professional and guild bodies continue to guarantee the transmission of French scribing throughout the training period for young people.</p>   |
| <b>5.</b>   | <b>COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND CONSENT (CF. CRITERION R.4)</b>  |
| <b>5.a.</b> | <p><b>PARTICIPATION OF COMMUNITIES, GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS:</b><br/> The professionals and apprentices concerned have demonstrated their commitment to the project by participating in the making of the film presented in an annex (The scribing tradition in French timber framing).<br/> The entire community of professional timber framers and apprentices undergoing training supports this project which will afford them publicity that they do not sufficiently enjoy at present at the national and international levels.</p>   |
| <b>5.b.</b> | <p><b>FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT:</b><br/> I, the undersigned, Antoine Saraiva, Director of CEREF BTP in Bourgtheroulde, hereby declare my support for the nomination of French Scribing for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.<br/> Done at Bourgtheroulde, 30 June 2008 &lt;signed&gt;<br/> Seven other letters are appended.</p>  |
| <b>5.c.</b> | <p><b>RESPECT FOR CUSTOMARY PRACTICES GOVERNING ACCESS:</b><br/> The symbolic aspects of instruction in the French scribe method are revealed in the context of the <i>Compagnonnage</i> only in a confidential manner during joining and induction ceremonies. These very particular circumstances are not open to outsiders, nor are they communicated to the outside world in any way. However, the general principles of this instruction, the universal aspects of which are affirmed by the Companions themselves, can be disseminated without restraint. The technical and historic aspects of scribing, the production of masterworks and masterpieces at the end of apprenticeships may be referred to normally, taking into account, of course, the great complexity of some productions.</p> |

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| <b>6.</b>   | INCLUSION ON AN INVENTORY (CF. CRITERION R.5):  |
|             | The scribing tradition in French timber framing is included in the inventory of living practices of the intangible cultural heritage of France that will be published shortly online at this website: <a href="http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/dp/ethno_spici/invent_invent.htm">http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/dp/ethno_spici/invent_invent.htm</a>   |
| <b>7.</b>   | DOCUMENTATION   |
| <b>7.a.</b> | <p>Film: <u>La tradition du tracé dans la charpente française</u>, réalisation François Calame, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication DRAC de Haute Normandie, CEREF BTP, 2008, durée: 12 minutes</p> <p>Bibliographie:</p> <p>Mathurin Jousse (1627) : <u>Théâtre de l'art de la charpenterie</u>, La Flèche</p> <p>Nicolas Fourneau (1767) : <u>L'art du trait de charpenterie</u>, à Rouen, chez Laurent Dumesnil</p> <p>Les Compagnons du Devoir (1993): <u>Charpentes et constructions bois</u>, catalogue d'exposition</p> <p>Musée National des Arts et Traditions populaires (1995) : <u>Le compagnonnage. chemin de l'excellence</u>, catalogue d'exposition</p> <p>Nicolas Adell-Gombert (2008) <u>Des hommes de devoir</u>, Collection Ethnologie de la France, Mission du patrimoine ethnologique, Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme</p> |
| <b>7.b.</b> | CESSION OF RIGHTS:<br>Appended.   |
| <b>7.c.</b> | LIST OF ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:   |
| <b>8.</b>   | CONTACT INFORMATION   |
| <b>8.a.</b> | SUBMITTING STATE PARTY: France  |
| <b>8.b.</b> | <p>François CALAME conseiller pour l'ethnologie<br/> francois.calame@culture.gouv.fr<br/> DRAC<br/> 2 rue Saint Sever<br/> 76000 ROUEN - FRANCE</p>   |
| <b>8.c.</b> | COMPETENT BODY INVOLVED:<br>DRAC de Haute-Normandie, service ethnologie   |
| <b>8.d.</b> | CONCERNED COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION(S) OR REPRESENTATIVE(S):<br>CEREF BTP, 781 rue de Thuit-Hébert, 27520 BOURGTHEROULDE   |
| <b>9.</b>   | SIGNATURE ON BEHALF OF THE STATE PARTY:   |
|             | <signed>  |