

Report of Monitoring Mission

CYPRUS, 24-29 January 1998

1 Background

I visited Cyprus from 24 to 29 January 1999, in order to evaluate the archaeological site of Choirokoitia, which had been nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List. Since this evaluation would not require more than two days to complete, I took advantage of my visit to study two World Heritage sites - No 79 Paphos and No 351 Painted Churches of the Troodos Mountains.

2 Paphos

This is a site that I know well, and so I was interested to study the work currently in progress to improve its presentation and conservation. I made a private visit on Sunday 25 January, in company with Dr Nicholas Stanley-Price (formerly of ICCROM and the Getty Conservation Institute), who was working in Cyprus at the time. The Acting Director General of Antiquities, Dr Sophocles Hadjisavvas, was aware of the visit, but was unable to accompany me that day. Later in my visit, however, I had the opportunity to discuss the plans for Paphos with Dr Hadjisavvas.

Since it was some seven years since I had been to Paphos, I quickly became aware of a number of changes. The boundary of the site of Nea Paphos is now more clearly defined and better fenced. However, part of the fencing had been breached by local inhabitants, so as to gain access to the beach. The area affected is, in fact, of limited archaeological importance, and so the authorities are proposing to exclude it from the protected area. I observed on my return to Paris, when I was able to study the nomination dossier of 1979/80, that the precise area inscribed on the World Heritage List was not clearly defined, as was usually the case at that period. There is also no buffer zone, although under the Cyprus law all monuments are surrounded by an area 500m broad where development is strictly controlled.

Recent excavations have revealed more detail in the classical town. While I was there a considerable area of the site was not accessible to the public, because consolidation was in progress, especially on some of the outstanding mosaics. There was also a major landscaping project in progress, which involves a considerable amount of earth-moving using heavy equipment. I was shown the plans when I visited the Department of Antiquities the following day. The project will greatly enhance the appearance of the site, particularly since it will be associated with new signage and interpretation facilities.

The rock-cut cemetery, known as the Tomb of the Kings, has been the subject of a special landscaping project. It was formerly rather hazardous for visitors, but low walls have been erected, using the local stone, to prevent visitors from falling over the steep drops to the sunken peristyle tombs. A number of alternative measures had been discussed, including the use of metal fences and rope barriers, but these were rejected in favour of the present solution. This seems to me to be the most acceptable system, given the absolute necessity for introducing security measures. The landscaping is unobtrusive and improves the overall quality of the site.

2 Painted Churches of the Troodos Mountains

I was accompanied on this visit by Dr Marina Ieronymidou, the senior member of the Department of Antiquities professional staff responsible for this region. In a long day I was able to visit six of the nine inscribed churches - Stavros Ayiasmati (Platanistasa), Panayia (Moutoullas), Panayia tou Arakou (Lagoudhera), Archangelos Michael (Pedhoullas), Panayia Phorviotissa (Nikitari), and Ayios Ionnis Lambadhistis (Kalopanayotis). In each case I met the parish priest.

As a group the churches are in a good state of conservation, although there is some variability attributable to the degree to which they are still in use. Excellent restoration work was in progress at two of the churches.

Each of the churches is inspected once a year by Department of Antiquities experts, who prepare detailed reports that form the basis of action plans. Minor projects are funded from annual budgets, whilst major projects, such as restoration of murals, operate on a two-year rolling programme basis. Full (100%) funding for restoration and conservation projects is provided by the State for the World Heritage churches; this contrasts with 50% maximum for other churches. The priests in charge are naturally very much in favour of this, but it should be added that all those to whom I spoke are immensely proud of their churches, and this has a beneficial influence on their state of conservation.

All the churches visited have excellent signs in Greek and English. They consist of a short description and simplified plan; all bear the World Heritage symbol. As with all protected monuments in Cyprus, each church is surrounded by a 500m buffer zone. In view of their locations, in or near small villages in remote mountain areas, these buffer zones may be judged to be adequate.

3 Conclusions

3.1. Paphos

The quality of the conservation work that I was able to study during my visit was high, in the tradition of the Cyprus Department of Antiquities. One point requires specific attention and comment from the State Party when producing its regular state of conservation report. It is important that the precise area inscribed on the World Heritage List should be clearly defined on the ground. There must also be an adequate buffer zone. This may need redefinition beyond the 500m specified in the legislation, in view of the dangers of encroachment and the erection of inappropriate buildings in what is a favoured tourist area.

3.2 Troodos Churches

These remarkable religious structures are well conserved and protected. The State Party deserves commendation for its policies with regard to them. It might also be appropriate to commend the contribution of the Church, and in particular of the priests in charge of the World Heritage monuments.

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