

Orkhon Valley (Mongolia)

No 1081 Rev

1. BASIC DATA

<i>State Party:</i>	Mongolian People's Republic
<i>Name of property:</i>	Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape
<i>Location:</i>	Orkhon-Kharkhorin Region
<i>Date received:</i>	9 January 2002
<i>Category of property:</i>	

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a site. In terms of Operational Guidelines paragraph 39 it is also a *cultural landscape*.

Brief description:

The nominated area encompasses an extensive area of pastureland either side of the Orkhon River, within which are numerous archaeological remains and five significant monuments including Kharkhorum, the capital of Chinggis (Genghis) Khan's vast Mongolian Empire.

Collectively these remains reflect the symbiotic links between nomadic, pastoral societies and their administrative and religious centres, and the importance of the Orkhon valley in the history of central Asia over the past two millennia. The grassland is still actively grazed by Mongolian nomadic pastoralists.

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

The nominated Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape is in central Mongolia, some 360 km southwest of Ulaanbaator, the capital. The site covers around 121,967 ha, along the Orkhon River. It is surrounded by a buffer Zone of around 61,044 ha – stretching in parts to the watershed of the valley. Over 90% of Mongolia's huge land area, extending to some 56 million km², is high-level pasture or desert wasteland, at an average altitude of around 1,500 m. It is thinly populated by 2.7 million people, the majority of whom are still engaged in pastoralism. The climate is harsh, with severe winters, and dry, with rainfall limited to on average 20 cm per year. Water is at a premium and the river valleys have therefore assumed great importance, becoming the focus for settlements of various kinds.

In Mongolia, nomadic pastoralism, the grazing of horses, sheep, goats, cows and camels, is perceived as much more than the objective technical demands of pastoral life: it is revered and glorified as the heart of Mongolian culture.

In turn Mongolian nomadic culture is part of a much wider distinctive nomadic pastoral culture, embracing many other people besides the Mongols and extending across central Asia. Over at least the past two millennia these nomadic cultures, through economic, political and cultural links, have made an immense impact on the sedentary cultures with which they interacted across Asia and into Europe.

Nomadic pastoralists spent their lives moving their herds from one pasture to another, sometimes covering vast distance each year. They operated and moved across their territory within strictly regulated and controlled ways, linked to the specific designation and use of grazing grounds and to territorial rights and social units. Underpinning this movement were fixed points, which could be cities, providing centres of government, crafts, trade and commerce, or religious sites, such as temples and funerary areas. The density of such fixed points varied enormously across the vast Eurasian steppes.

The Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape is being put forward as one of the key areas in Mongolia where the links between nomadic pastoralism and the associated settlements can be seen most clearly, where there is a high density of remains, and where above all these remains are of national and international importance. The Orkhon Valley was at the centre of traffic across the Asian steppes and became the capital of first the Uighur Empire and then later of the Mongol Empire, described in the nomination document, as 'the greatest empire the world has ever known'.

The nominated site straddles the Orkhon River, which flows north, draining into Lake Baikal across the border in Russia. The broad, shallow river valley provides water and shelter, key requisites for its role as a staging post on the ancient trade routes across the steppes, such as those now known as the 'Silk Road', and for its development as the centre of two of the vast central Asian empires.

Specifically the valley provides evidence of:

- 6th/7th century Turkish memorial sites
- 8th/9th century Uighur capital of Khar Balgas
- 13th/14th century Mongol capital of Kharkhorum
- The earliest surviving Mongol Buddhist monastery at Erdene
- The Hermitage Monastery of Tuvkhun
- Shankh Western Monastery
- Palace at Doit Hill
- Ancient towns of Talyn dorvoljin, Har bondgor, and Bayangol am
- Deer Stones and ancient graves
- Sacred Mountains of Hangai Ovoo and Undor Sant
- Long tradition of nomadic pastoralism

The main monuments are open to the public.

Turkish Memorials of Khosho Tsaidam: Located in the Tsaidam Valley Lake along the western part of the Orkhon River, are two memorial monuments associated with the Turkish Empire in the early 8th century. These are the Bilge Khan and Kultegin memorials – commemorating a politician and his younger brother who was Commander in Chief of the armed forces. There are two other smaller memorials and a fifth that has just been revealed.

Large numbers of Turkish remains are known across what was the vast Turkish Empire, which stretched from the edges of China (they besieged what is now Xi'an) in the

east, to what is now Iran in the west. Only however in Mongolia have memorials to kings, lords and aristocrats been found. Those at Khosho Tsaidam are the largest and most impressive monuments of their kind. They consist of huge, vertical stone tablets inscribed with the distinctive Turkish runic-like script – the earliest Inner Asian known language - first deciphered in 1893 and providing much evidence of Turkish culture.

The Bilge Khan memorial is set within a walled enclosure. The inscribed stone has a carved twisted dragon at its top and on one of the faces a carved ibex – the emblem of Turkish khans. The slab was set into the back of a carved stone turtle. Found alongside was a beautiful carving of a man and a woman sitting cross-legged – perhaps the Khan and his queen.

The Kultegin memorial, also originally erected on a stone turtle, was similarly set within an enclosure, with walls covered in white adobe and decorated inside with coloured pictures. Fragments of carved figures of perhaps the Khan and his wife have also been found. In both enclosures is there evidence of altars.

The sites were first excavated in 1889. Since 2000, Mongolian and Turkish archaeologists have collaborated in comprehensive excavation and study of the area. Protective fences have been erected around the site and a purpose built building put up to house recovered items and provide work-space for researchers.

Ruins of Khar Balgas City: Khar Balgas was the capital of the Uighur Empire, which governed the area for around 100 years in the 8th and 9th centuries. It served not only as the administrative centre but also as a trading and cultural centre for the empire's extensive network across Asia and into Europe. The large, fortified town – covering 50 square kilometres –, was an important staging post along the Silk Road, and had within its walls a palace, military barracks, shops, temples, monasteries, as well as districts for farmers and craftsmen.

Russians surveyed the palace ruins in 1889. Remains of the city walls and buildings constructed in rammed earth have remained untouched since Russian archaeologists conducted partial excavations in 1949. Little work has yet been done in deciphering the finds, which include engraved stone tablets in the Uighur script based on the Sogd alphabet, some with decorative motifs of dragons.

Ruins of Kharkhorum City: Kharkhorum was established as the centre of Chinggis Khan's Mongolian Empire in 1220. It remained the capital until the end of the 14th century. From Kharkhorum, Chinggis Khan entertained numerous foreign delegates from as far afield as what is now Iraq, Armenia and Georgia in the west, and from India, China and Korea.

Investigations have been carried out at Kharkhorum intermittently since the end of the 19th century. Very little remained above ground.

Since 1999 Mongolian and German archaeologists have conducted joint excavations with remarkable results. Remains of palaces, city gates, workshops houses and paved streets have been identified. Excavated items include domestic fragments as well as relics associated with Islam and Nestorian Christianity.

It is now established that the city covered some 64 km². Built on high foundations, the palace of Ugedei Khan

(Ghinggis's son) had a roof covered with red and green tiles supported by 64 columns of oriental design. Within, the floor was paved in green ceramic tiles, the walls decorated with green murals and there is evidence of decorative sculptures.

Erdene Zuu Monastery: Buddhism spread across the Mongolian Empire in the 13th century becoming the state religion in 1586. Erdene Zuu monastery was the first Buddhist monastery to be established in Mongolia on the southern side of Kharkhorum at the end of the 16th century. The monastery is surrounded by a wall interspersed with 108 white subargans (stupas). Within the wall were originally 62 structures, laid out to reflect Mongol town and palace planning. 44 were destroyed as a result of atheistic ideologies between 1937 and 1940. The surviving 18 buildings are gradually being restored, 3 as places of worship, the remainder being used as museums.

Tuvkhun Hermitage Monastery: This spectacularly sited monastery on a hilltop 2,600 m above sea-level and with wide views out across the grazing grounds, grew out of meditation caves, natural caves used by hermits.

In the 17th century, Ondor Gegeen Zanabazar, one of Chinggis Khan's descendants, who is revered as the person who 'Mongolised' Tibetan Buddhism, built the hermitage monastery around the caves. The monastery created images of the Buddha that were quite distinct in form from those of India and Tibet.

Like the Erdene Zuu Monastery, the Tuvkhun Hermitage monastery suffered destruction between 1938 and 1940. All the main buildings were demolished, only the meditation caves and two wells survived. Parts of the monastery were rebuilt in the 1990s from photographic evidence and using traditional methods and materials.

Shankh Western Monastery: Sited on the bank of the Harz River, this monastery dates from 1654. Eight temples were added to it between 1774 and 1885. It was particularly noted for a ceremony associated with the state flag of Chinggis Khan. Like other monasteries, it was largely destroyed in 1937. Renovation work started in 1990.

Palace at Doit Hill: This 13th-14th century palace, thought to be of Ogodei Khan, overlooks a cluster of small lakes near the White Lake of Doit. There are remains of 18 structures, the largest 45 by 60 metres with remaining stones of polished granite.

Ancient towns of Talyn dorvoljin, Har bondgor, Bayangol am: Within the wider landscape there are remains of these three large towns. Each has substantial remaining walls up to 100m across. None has yet been investigated but surface finds indicate 13th century dates.

Deer Stones and ancient graves: Scattered widely across the nominated site are extensive remains of hundreds of Bronze Age graves some with stones engraved with herds of deer and images of the sun and moon. A few have been excavated.

Sacred Mountains of Hangai Owoo and Undor Sant: Prominently sited, these two mountains are strongly associated with the Shaman tradition of praying for health and prosperity to the forces of mountains, a tradition absorbed by Buddhism and still extant today.

Long tradition of nomadic pastoralism: Integrating all these sites and underpinning them is the tradition of nomadic pastoralism stretching back at least three millennia. This unites the area and still gives it its distinctive character. It produces scant tangible remains apart from graves. More important are the intangible rites, rituals and seasonal traditions associated with this culture, reflected in the management of livestock and the processing of wool, milk, meat and bone. Around 450 families of herders currently winter in the nominated area and many more families move freely through the area throughout the year.

History

Modern Mongolia comprises only about half of the vast Inner Asian region known throughout history as Mongolia. It is also only a fraction of the great Chinggis Khan's Mongul Empire, which in the 13th and 14th centuries stretched from Korea to Hungary, covering nearly all of Asia except the Indian sub-continent and parts of south-east Asia. It was the largest contiguous land empire the world has known. Many people from societies conquered by the Mongols have written about them – much unfavourable. On the other hand Mongol sources emphasise the almost god-like military genius of Chinggis Khan whose success rested not just on military skill but also on increasingly sophisticated administrative systems. The empire's success – over nearly two centuries – also depended on the absorption and employment of Chinese, Iranian, Russians and others. Mongolia and its people have thus had a significant and lasting impact on the historical development of major nations such as China and Russia, and periodically influenced the entire Eurasian continent.

Until the mid 20th century most of the people who inhabited Mongolia were nomads. The Mongols were one of several distinct nomadic peoples living in Mongolia who over the past two millennia have engaged in constantly shifting alliances, with centralised states such as the Huns, Syanbi, Jujan, Turkic and Uighur Empires emerging from time to time between the 3rd century BC and the 9th century AD. Over the centuries, some nomadic peoples moved west to establish the Hun Empire in Europe while others moved into Iran, India and China.

For two centuries, the establishment of Chinggis Khan's Empire, with its centralised control, interrupted this pattern and put in place sophisticated military and political systems, which exceeded in skill and efficiency most others of the time. Under Chinggis and his successors, the Mongols conquered most of Eurasia.

In the early 16th century with the waning of the empire, Mongolia once again became a land of warring factions. From the late 17th to the early 20th centuries, Mongolia was a major focus of Russian and Manchu-Chinese rivalry, leading eventually to the fragmentation of Mongolia, with Inner Mongolia (the south part of Mongolia) being absorbed by the Chinese and with increasing Russian interest in Outer Mongolia. Russia's predominance in Outer Mongolia was unquestioned by 1921 and in 1924 the Mongolian People's Republic was established – under the control of Moscow. Mongolia became an independent State in 1946.

Today more Mongolians – around 3.5 million – live in Inner Mongolia, China, than in the Mongolian People's Republic, which has a population of 2.7 million.

Management regime

Legal provision:

Parliament Resolution No. 43 under the Law on Special Protected Areas, 1994, declared an area of the Khangai Mountains, including the upper part of Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape, a State Special Protection Area, establishing Khangai Mountain National Park in 1996.

The remit of this national park includes addressing issues associated with water, climate change, and ecological balance.

The Northern part of the Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape has been given "limited protected status" under a Law on Special Protected Area Buffer Zones passed in 1997. This restricts the following activities: agriculture, forestry and mining. Further developments or economic activities require approval from local authorities on the basis of an Environmental Impact Assessment. Within the Buffer Zone, it is suggested that tourism facilities, roads and bridge construction, which are judged not to have a negative effect, will be permitted with permission. Low impact cattle breeding will be allowed but permission will be needed for activities such as the erection of livestock pens, digging wells, making hay, and construction of new buildings.

The five primary sites in the Orkhon Valley have been designated Special Protected Areas. This means that they are subject to State control, and occupation or economic use are prohibited. These designations were prompted by recommendations made to the Government during the course of the Management Plan process.

Within the wider valley, 24 historical and archaeological sites have been designated as Protected Monuments. Of these, 20 are in the nominated area.

According to the Constitution of Mongolia adopted in 1992, each citizen has the right to live in a healthy and safe environment; additionally, lands and natural resources can be subject to national ownership and state protection.

The State central administration, local authorities, and local governors are obligated to supervise the conservation and protection of historical and cultural heritage. The legal protection of cultural and historical heritage is assigned either to the state or to local authorities, depending on the nature of the site.

Through a raft of legal measures (detailed in the nomination), the Government plans to limit the commercial activities that could have a negative effect on the nominated site and to support activities that meet proper use requirements.

Management structure:

A detailed Management Plan has been prepared for the site. This is very thorough and readable and aims towards the sustainable development of the valley through putting in place a lasting harmony between ecology and nomadic pastoralism, which sustains the value of the property.

The Management Plan evolved out of a conference on the Management of World Heritage: the 'Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape' supported by 60 specialists and 400 stakeholders.

The plan addresses the pastoral economy and ecology of the site as well as the conservation of the five key monuments. The plan gives detailed prescription for addressing many of the key threats to the area. The recommendations identifies Risk Preparedness; Conservation and Protection; Research and Information; Education; Publicity; Public & Economic Interests; Tourism; Development of museums and overall Management of the site as key issues and prescribes measures for the active implementation of the plan within a strict monitoring system.

The Orkhon Valley nominated area and buffer zone covers two administrative units (aimags) and five districts (soums).

The Ministry of Culture is responsible for the general implementation of legislation regulating the preservation, protection, and exploitation of the Orkhon Valley Cultural Heritage Site, while municipal authorities are responsible for the enforcement of these laws.

Currently there is no co-ordinated administration of the Orkhon Valley Cultural Heritage area. Of the specific sites within the Orkhon Valley, only Erdene Zuu monastery has its own administration, which also has responsibility for the Khosho Tsaidam monuments. Tuvkhun Monastery is guarded by a resident lama, while the Khosho Tsaidam monuments and Khar Balgas ruins are protected by hired guards.

The Management Plan affirms the commitment of the Government of Mongolia to strengthening mechanisms of protection, monitoring, exploitation and co-ordination for these valuable heritage sites, and to providing integrated management through the establishment of a distinct administrative body for the Orkhon Valley World Heritage Site. Detailed administrative arrangements for this body are given in the Management Plan.

Resources:

Currently, there is no administrative body in the Orkhon Valley heritage area that has funding to undertake protection and conservation of historic sites – with the exception of the Erdene Zuu museum administration, which obtains its funding directly from tourism. The administration of Erdene Zuu monastery provides additional funds for research, preservation and protection activities. In addition, Erdene Zuu's monastery's Lavrin temple is an active place of worship, which obtains financial support from the monastery's administration. Other historic sites do not receive any funds from the state budget.

At the current time, financial allocations for the protection, restoration and research activities within the nominated cultural landscape are provided from local and foreign investment. In total 3.2 million US \$ have been provided for this purpose during the last five years.

The Management Plan suggests that income for preservation, protection, conservation and restoration activities in the Orkhon Valley could be collected in the following ways:

- Setting annual budget allocations for heritage site management at the state and municipal levels
- Appropriating taxation income from tourism-related businesses making use of the heritage sites
- Offering fee-based services for the Orkhon Valley Cultural Heritage Administration
- Soliciting financial contributions and assistance from local and international organizations, countries and citizens.

It is however reported in the Evaluation Report that the Mongolian government has recently agreed a national plan to fund the protection of cultural heritage, which will benefit the Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape as one of its first batch of projects.

Justification by the State Party (summary)

The nomadic cultures of central Asia have for millennia been the main cultures over a large part of Asia and have made an immense contribution to the world, through trade, conquest and the transmission of ideas.

The Orkhon Valley represents the way nomadic use of the landscape is underpinned by strategic, military and spiritual centres, which facilitated trade and the growth of empires.

The Orkhon Valley provides striking evidence of the way successive nomadic cultures have used its natural advantages of water, shelter and strategic position to establish centres of power and influence. These are now manifest in a number of key sites: the Turkish funerary monuments of the 6th/7th centuries, the 8th/9th century Uighur capital of Khar Balgas as well as the Mongol imperial capital of Kharkhorum and the monasteries of Erdene Zuu and Tuvkhun dating from the 16th and 17th century.

The way the valley is used today is still essentially as a resource for a nomadic pastoral culture. The landscape demonstrates the features of nomadic life exceptionally well. In spite of some modern intrusions, the grassland steppe is remarkably unchanged, particularly in the Hangayn Nuruu National Park.

3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

Actions by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS Mission visited the site in August 2002.

The nomination was considered by the World Heritage Committee in June 2003. The Committee agreed that nomination should be *deferred* in order that the State Party could clarify whether or not the nomination was for the Orkhon valley cultural landscape, or for five discrete, archaeological sites.

A revised nomination for one site encompassing the wider cultural landscape was submitted in January 2004.

Conservation

Conservation history:

The nomination document acknowledges that many of the monastery buildings are in need of conservation and that progress has been slow. Preventative conservation could also be a problem with very few people to look after the buildings and contents to which the public have access. For instance the evaluation report mentions that the Tuvkhun monastery is managed by one lama. Nevertheless work has been carried out within the Erdene Zuu Monastery to protect Buddhist artefacts from visitors and also from theft and fire – the latter grant-aided by UNESCO in 1998.

The lack of maintenance of the mud walls that relate to the two ruined cities is also acknowledged but at Kharkhorum a protective fence has been erected around the site (in 1995). Similarly a protective fence has been installed around the Turkish graves and recovered broken and weathered stones housed in a newly erected building.

In the wider landscape, problems with the lowering of the water table associated with tree cutting and mining, the pollution of watercourses, and the effects of over-grazing are acknowledged and these are addressed in the Management Plan. The vulnerability of intangible traditions is also mentioned. Threats to the traditional, pastoral way of life, through the introduction of mechanised production in the mid 20th century were severe. These have now been reversed and there is a strong commitment to giving high recognition to the 'indissoluble' links between the traditions of nomadic pastoralism and the landscape and to put in place measures to allow the sustainable development of these traditions in harmony with the natural values of the grasslands.

State of conservation:

The Management Plan fully acknowledges the conservation needs. The administrative structure proposed to deliver the Management Plan would become the key mechanism for developing conservation projects and on-going maintenance programmes and for lobbying for funds.

In terms of specialised conservation, since 2000 the Turkish Cooperation Agency has supported archaeological investigation and conservation of the Turkish monuments.

Risk analysis:

One missing element in the Management Plan (an otherwise admirable document) is a chapter on threats and vulnerabilities to the significances. (Historical damage and existing undesirable change is listed but not future threats) Nevertheless the proposed actions imply the threats and risks. These fall into the following three broad categories:

Natural:

- Flooding;
- Earthquakes;
- Forest fires;
- Weathering of statues and erosion and possible collapse of mud walls;
- River pollution from unauthorised tree cutting and gold mining

People:

- Population growth;
- Urban spread from the main town in the valley;
- Overgrazing leading to desertification & wind erosion;
- Over visiting by tourists –steadily increasing in recent years;
- Random vehicular tracks;
- Vandalism and theft.

Conservation:

- Reconstruction of buildings which could endanger historical evidence (in the Erdene Zuu monastery);
- Neglect of isolated scattered sites.

The management plan addresses these issues. It is a visionary and aspirational plan – no quick answers are proposed. Instead the plan intends to consider many of the fundamental issues, which underlie and link some of these threats. Moves toward more sustainable living in the valley are clearly essential to try and halt the environmental decline, which in turn is threatening the cultural heritage assets. Promoting research and establishing base line indicators are a necessary first step.

Authenticity and integrity

Overall the Orkhon Valley has a high degree of authenticity as a continuing cultural landscape, which reflects Central Asian nomadic pastoralism, notwithstanding some damage and degradation.

The agricultural development policies of the 1950s encouraged settlement and arable cultivation in the vicinity of Kharkhorum and Khar Balgas. This process has now been reversed with arable cultivation abandoned and several buildings demolished. The same policies led to collectivisation of the herds and this in turn led to over-grazing of the grassland in some places. Collectivisation has been reversed, and there is now agreement to limit the number of grazing animals after a capacity study has been undertaken.

What both the nomination document and the management plan refer to is the intrusion of roads, power lines and a power generation plant in the ruins of Karakhorum. These are visually intrusive but are 'reversible' and could be removed at a future date. The Plan also refers to intrusive tracks and garbage dumps and some looting of ancient graves for their stones. The problems are recognised but will not be solved immediately.

Outside the nominated area and outside the Buffer Zone is the new Kharakhorin settlement immediately to the west of ancient Kharkhorum. The management plan acknowledges that houses there have been constructed in a 'disorganised manner' and that there are currently no zoning regulations restricting the growth of this settlement. The plan also acknowledges the need for control and clearly without control this settlement could impact adversely on the integrity of the wider landscape as a setting for the nominated area.

Very little information is given on the state of the ubiquitous grass – the grazing resource that underpinned the whole development of the valley. It is not clear how much it is still the species-rich pastureland characteristic of upland steppes in Mongolia. The management plan emphasises how vital it is to sustain nomadic pastoralism as a means of managing the grassland and continuing intangible and tangible traditions associated with this way of life.

Many of the temple structures were extensively damaged in the 1930s deliberate ideological destruction of religious buildings. However the surviving buildings appear to have kept their authenticity. The work to repair and re-build damaged building has been undertaken using methods and material traditional to Mongolian society which in one sense has ensured the survival of authentic practices. Nevertheless the issue of whether rebuilding more temples could damage the authenticity of the surviving remains needs to be addressed and this is acknowledged in the nomination

The encouraged revival of the Mongolian Buddhist religion associated with both the new and surviving buildings (something that is happening across Mongolia and Inner Mongolia) means that the buildings still used for Buddhist rituals have a greater authenticity than they would otherwise have had.

As for the ruins and archaeological sites, it seems to be the case that, apart from structured archaeological excavations, most of the ruins are undisturbed and therefore the authenticity of the archaeological components is high.

The integrity of the site relates to the coherence of the valley landscape and the close relationship between the main sites and their surrounding grasslands and minor sites.

Comparative evaluation

It is important to consider how the Orkhon valley compares with other cultural landscapes within the grassland steppes of Eurasia.

First of all the high altitude grassland steppes cover a vast area of central Asia – most of Mongolia, large parts Inner Mongolia in China, parts of southern Russia and also eastern Afghanistan and Kirghistan – and in much of these areas ancient pastoral traditions and degrees of nomadism persist. Numerous groups make up these pastoralists but Mongols are probably the largest – in terms of the grazed area they occupy.

In the Orkhon Valley what is distinctive is the combination of grassland nomadic culture with remains of ancient urban, centralised or highly socially structured societies, strong religious evidence and links with international trade routes as well as a landscape that is considered ‘beautiful’.

Within Mongolia there are other urban sites such as Baibalyk, a city of the Uighur Empire and Kharbalgas, a trading city of the Uighur Empire and later, whose ruins are better preserved than at Kharkhorum. In southern Russia around the Kharkhiraa River, is Khöndiin city that was the realm of Chingghis Khan’s younger brother, Khasar; and others such as Dudn Ereg and Elstei where investigations have uncovered remains of complex

administrative trading, craftwork and military centres as at Kharkhorum.

Within China there are numerous abandoned cities scattered across the vast grass steppes and marking the lines of the Silk Road branches. Some have hardly been investigated and many are even without even a name. A good number have survived in better condition than those in the Orkhon valley, such as the ancient city of Jiaohe near Turpan, or Yuanshangdu, much larger than Kharkhorum and one of the capitals of the Yuan Dynasty, just south of Inner Mongolia.

In China there are also spectacularly beautiful grasslands associated with cities such as, for instance, those around Lake Barkol. In China too are grasslands with monasteries associated with annual festivals, such as the Mongolian area of northern Yunnan near Zhongdian, or the Tagong grasslands of western Sichuan. These have Buddhist temples, which could be said to be better than those of Orkhon in architectural terms.

However what the Orkhon valley displays is more than architectural significance: its value lies in the assembly of structures and their representivity. Nowhere else immediately comes into focus if the field is narrowed to grassland steppes that exhibit a combination of secular and religious monuments, have urban remains from the capitals of two empires, and still retain a vibrant pastoral culture.

However this is an under-researched area. If more work was done on some of the abandoned cities of China or Russia the picture might well change. Nevertheless it could be argued that within the vast expansive steppes of Central Asia it is likely that there are going to be enough distinctive cultural landscapes to justify more than one nomination. This nomination exemplifies the way one valley became the focus of two mighty empires of the Uighurs and Mongol peoples. Elsewhere other valleys could well have provided mercantile and spiritual support for nomadic peoples, but have developed in quite a different way, and in so doing exemplified alternative approaches to resources deployment – but still manifesting cultural remains of universal value.

Outstanding universal value

General statement:

The wider Orkhon Valley is an outstanding example of an evolving cultural landscape which, through sustainable land-use practices and a spiritual relationship to nature, harnessed the traditions of nomadic pastoralism to support huge empires that had a profound influence on the whole of central Asia and far into Europe, and created built structures whose remains are now of universal significance.

The wider Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape Site is characteristic of the comparatively sheltered river valleys, which dissect the vast Mongolian steppes. It is distinctive in the way its considerable material remains demonstrate the centralised and urban character at the heart of the vast Uigher and later Mongol Empires which brought much of central Asia within one comparatively unified control.

The remains also reflect the enormous influence these ‘nomadic empires’ had in economic, cultural and political terms over a large part of Asia and over the major nations

with which they interacted from China to the edges of Eastern Europe.

The emerging archaeology of the Turkish commemorative sites and of the city of Kharkhorum testifies to sophisticated cultures with extensive links along the trade routes from China to Europe and India.

The Buddhist remains reflect the adoption of Buddhism as the official religion in Mongolia as well as the distinctive Mongolised form of Buddhism which emerged centred on the hermitage monastery of Tuvkhun.

Over-arching these critical heritage sites is the persistence of Mongolian nomadic pastoral culture, which spawned the empires and still dominates the life of the Orkhon valley and indeed much of Mongolia. Its longevity is reflected in the huge number of burial and ceremonial sites, stone figures and rock paintings, which litter the valley floor of the nominated site and of its Buffer Zone and whose age range spans more than two millennia from the Bronze Age to the modern era.

Finally the strong intangible culture of the nomadic pastoralists expresses itself in, for instance, annual festivals, music, oral literature, horse-riding skills, and also in the vital meanings and associations with which the landscape is imbued.

Evaluation of criteria:

The site is nominated under *criteria ii, iii, and iv*.

Criterion ii: The Orkhon valley clearly demonstrates the way the landscape of the valley and more widely its hinterland has, through the use of its resources by a strong and persistent nomadic culture, led to the development of extensive trade networks and the creation of large administrative, commercial, military and religious centres.

The empires that these urban centres supported undoubtedly influenced societies across Asia and into Europe and in turn absorbed influence from both east and west in a true interchange of human values. This interchange of values is manifest in the design of the Uighur city and of the city of Kharkhorum (with its Islamic style columns and Chinese style roof tiles); in the adoption of the Buddhist religion and its subsequent modification by Mongolian traditions.

It would be difficult to find a society that has had a greater influence – for both good and bad – across such a large sweep of the globe than did the Mongol Empire of Ghinggis Khan. For nearly two centuries the exploits of the great Khans' forces terrorised (both actually and in anticipation) lands to their west -reaching to the gates of Vienna- and east. Their success reflected the skill and organisation of the mounted army, which drew expertise from both Chinese and Muslim siege warfare experts. This consolidation of these conquests, made possible by one of them most formidable war machines the world has known, and the subsequent wide-ranging trade, led to the fortified towns and religious remains in the Orkhon Valley.

Criterion iii: The Orkhon Valley bears an exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition that is still living. Underpinning all the development within the Orkhon valley for the past two millennia has been a strong culture of nomadic pastoralism. This culture is still a revered and indeed central part of Mongolian society and is highly respected as a 'noble' way to live in harmony with the

landscape. It is also perceived to have a far greater value than the life of settled arable farmers.

The pastoral nomadic traditions are very much alive and the landscape it is argued is a living testimony to the persistence of this culture – both in the grazing traditions and in the remains of cities with which people identify.

Criterion iv: It is argued that the Orkhon valley is an outstanding example of a valley that illustrates several significant stages in human history. First and foremost it was the centre of the Mongolian Empire and thus retains a memory of one of the world greatest empires. Secondly it reflects a particular Mongolian variation of Turkish power – through the distinctive memorial stones – only found in Mongolia. Thirdly, it provided the setting for the Tuvkhun hermitage monastery in which developed a Mongolian form of Buddhism and local Buddhist sculpture. And fourthly, through the remains of Khar Balgas, it demonstrates significant remains of the capital of the Uighur Empire – about which much more needs to be known but which highlights the importance of Uighur urban culture.

4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for the future

The wider Orkhon Valley is clearly of outstanding universal value as a cultural landscape.

Support for the nomination should not ignore real vulnerabilities. However the commitment shown to tackle these vulnerabilities through the development of the Management Plan, with widespread involvement of stakeholders, and the way in which those writing the Plan successfully persuaded the government to grant official protection to parts of the site, has demonstrated a real commitment to the world heritage process. The strong enthusiasm shown by local people and the state party for the nomination should be harnessed.

The original nomination included a proposal to build a visitor centre located directly outside the walls of the old city of Kharkhorum. Such a site would present an unacceptable intrusion into the landscape. The State Party has now agreed to consider alternative sites for this development outside the nominated area.

Recommendation with respect to inscription

That the property be inscribed on the World Heritage List as a *cultural landscape* on the basis of *criteria ii, iii, and iv*:

Criterion ii: The Orkhon valley clearly demonstrates how a strong and persistent nomadic culture, led to the development of extensive trade networks and the creation of large administrative, commercial, military and religious centres. The empires that these urban centres supported undoubtedly influenced societies across Asia and into Europe and in turn absorbed influence from both east and west in a true interchange of human values.

Criterion iii: Underpinning all the development within the Orkhon valley for the past two millennia

has been a strong culture of nomadic pastoralism. This culture is still a revered and indeed central part of Mongolian society and is highly respected as a 'noble' way to live in harmony with the landscape.

Criterion iv: The Orkhon valley is an outstanding example of a valley that illustrates several significant stages in human history. First and foremost it was the centre of the Mongolian Empire; secondly it reflects a particular Mongolian variation of Turkish power; thirdly, the Tuvkhun hermitage monastery was the setting for the development of a Mongolian form of Buddhism; and fourthly, Khar Balgas, reflects the Uighur urban culture in the capital of the Uighur Empire.

ICOMOS, May 2004