

## Derbent (Russian Federation)

No 1070

### 1. BASIC DATA

<i>State Party</i>	Russian Federation
<i>Name of property:</i>	Ancient City and Fortress Buildings of Derbent
<i>Location:</i>	Dagestan, Eastern Caucasus, Western Seaboard of Caspian Sea
<i>Date received:</i>	28 June 2001
<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: *group of buildings*. In terms of *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, this is a section of an inhabited historic town.

#### *Brief description:*

The Citadel, Ancient City and Fortress buildings of Derbent were part of the northern limes of the Sasanian Persian Empire, which extended to east and west of the Caspian Sea. The fortification was built in stone, and it consisted of two parallel walls that formed a barrier from the seaside up to the mountain. The town of Derbent was built between these two walls, and has still retained part of its medieval fabric. The site continued having great strategic importance until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### 2. THE PROPERTY

#### *Description*

The ancient city of Derbent is situated on the western shores of the Caspian Sea, in the narrowest place between the sea and the slopes of the Tabasaran mountains (part of the Bigger Caucasus). The city has an important strategic location as it forms a natural pass (the Caspian Gates) between the Caucasian foothills and the sea. For many centuries, it was thus in the position to control the traffic between Europe and the Middle East. As a result of this geographic particularity the city developed between two parallel defence walls, stretching from the sea up to the mountains. Over the centuries, the city has been given different names, all connected to the word 'gate' ('*dar band*' in Persian means 'lock gate'). The fortification was originally built during the Sasanian Empire, and continuously repaired or improved until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, until its military function lasted. The fortification consists of the defence walls, the citadel (Narin-Kala), and the historic town.

**The Defence Walls:** The Defence Walls are the most outstanding feature of Derbent. They rise from the Caspian Sea up to the citadel on the mountain, an overall length of ca 3.6 km. There are two walls (north and south) running parallel, ca 300-400 m from each other. The city was built between these walls. The wall then continues over the

mountains ca 40 km to the west (mountain wall), as well as extending into the Sea (ca 500 m), in order to protect the harbour. The north wall still exists in its full length, while much of the south wall was demolished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest parts of the walls are in unbaked bricks, but the main part of the structure (6<sup>th</sup> century CE) is built in solid ashlar stone (in average: 100 x 65 x 25 cm) with lime mortar, and a rubble core. Some of the later construction used smaller stones (ca 30 x 40 cm). The stones are laid face and header side alternately for better binding. The thickness of the walls varies from 230 cm to 380 cm; the height is about 12 m.

A total of 73 defence towers were built at regular intervals. The north wall has 46 towers, ca 70 m from each other. There are several gates, which are of architectural interest in their design. Originally, most gates date from the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, but some have been rebuilt or changed later. There used to be 14 gates, and 9 still remain, 2 in the citadel, 4 in the south wall, and 3 in the north wall: *Narin-Kala-kapi* (Mountain Gate), *Kali-kapi* (Citadel Gate), *Bajat-kapi* (Song Masters Gate), *Orta-kapi* (Middle Gate, upper part rebuilt in 1812), *Dubari-kapi* (Double Wall Gate), *Dzharchi-kapi* (Messenger Gate, rebuilt in 1811), *Kirkhlar-kapi* (Gate of Forty, rebuilt in 17<sup>th</sup> century), *Dash-kapi* (Stone Gate, 10-12<sup>th</sup> centuries).

**The Citadel:** The Citadel is situated up on the mountain. It covers an area of ca 180 m x 280 m (4.5 ha), fairly irregular in shape. The walls of the citadel are provided by small defence towers distanced 20-30 m from each other. The most interesting of these is in the south-west corner, a square tower that serves as a link to the mountain wall. On three sides, the citadel is defended by steep slopes. Inside the Citadel, there are a number of historic buildings, though most of them in ruins.

Along the southern wall, there is the Khan's Palace, which was an elaborate building with courtyards, but now partly in ruins. In the Citadel, there are also the remains of a 5<sup>th</sup> century Christian church, subsequently built over when other religions were introduced (Zoroastrianism, and then Islam). '*Djuma-mesjid*' is one of the earliest mosques in the former USSR. It probably dates from the 8<sup>th</sup> century, though renovated or rebuilt in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The *madrasah* building, in front of the mosque, dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Together with an administrative building, the *Mosque* and *Madrasah* form a closed courtyard. The citadel also has bath buildings and several underground water tanks.

**The Historic Town:** Between the two defence walls, there developed the city of Derbent. The area, ca 300 m wide and over 3 km long, was articulated in two main parts, and there were also some transversal walls (dating from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries). The western part, on the mountain slope just under the Citadel, formed the residential section. The eastern part, close to the sea, was used for merchants, craftsmen, storage buildings, barracks and depots. Close to the seafront, there was another fort built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for the Shah's Palace, which has since been demolished. In the second half the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Derbent lost its defence function; most of the southern wall was demolished, and the modern town developed in the lower part of the walled area, along the seafront (in north-south direction), as well as on both sides of the ancient walled city. Nevertheless, most of the historic town core has been preserved, though

with some minor alterations, such as a new main street. The old city was divided in separate quarters (*magals*), and the street pattern referred to the gates. The streets are narrow and tortuous. The town still contains interesting courtyard houses, as well as some public buildings: mosques, baths, *madrassahs*, and the remains of a caravanserai. The building material is stone, and there are some carved decorations. The two focal points of the old town were the mosque and the caravanserai.

### **History**

The site of Derbent is understood to have been inhabited since some 5,000 years. There was a fortress structure already in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, the place was part of a new state formed in the area of Azerbaijan and southern Dagestan.

The subsequent periods related to the nominated property can be summarised as follows:

- Sasanian Empire from 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries CE;
- Arab Caliphate from 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries;
- Mongol rule from 13<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries;
- Timurid Empire from 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries;
- Shirvan Khan from 1437;
- Turkish-Persian conflicts during the 16<sup>th</sup> century;
- Safavid Empire from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century;
- Derbent Khanate from 1747;
- Russia from 1813.

The Persians (Sasanians) conquered the site at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. The current fortification and the town originate from the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, when they were built as an important part of the Sasanian northern *limes*, the frontier against the nomadic people in the north. From this time and until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Derbent remained an important military post. From the 7<sup>th</sup> century, it was ruled by the Arabs, taken over by the Mongols in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and by the Timurids in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Persians took it back in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century (the Safavid ruler Shah Abbas, whose capital was in Isfahan). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Persians and Russians fought over Derbent, and finally the Russian sovereignty was recognized by the Persian Shah in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Over some 15 centuries, the fortification system was in military use. It was regularly maintained and repaired, and additions were built according to needs. In 1820, the south wall was demolished and an active building started in the lower part of the city. The upper part, with its 11-12,000 inhabitants, remained more or less intact. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the economy was in decline, but the city recovered at the end of the century, when the Vladicaucasus railway established a connection with Baku (1900). At the moment, the city is again facing some problems, and looks for new resources such as tourism.

### **Management regime**

#### *Legal provision:*

The monuments of history and culture are owned and protected by the State according to the prescriptions of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet Decree of 27.12.1991. The list of these monuments has been confirmed by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 20.02.1995. The land where the monuments are situated is in federal ownership in accordance with the Land Code of the Russian Federation. Lands and monuments are turned over to the Reserve of History and Art of Derbent who exercise their right for operative management.

#### *Management structure:*

The control for the implementation of conservation and restoration programmes is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Dagestan, together with Committees on land and natural resources. The republican programmes on preservation are further controlled by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation.

A management plan is in elaboration on the basis of the 1995 legislation, and taking into account all the other relevant guidelines and instructions. This plan has short-term and long-term measures to protect the property, and to guarantee its authenticity and integrity.

#### *Resources:*

The special Federal Programme, 'Culture of Russia (2001-2005)', has one million rubles earmarked for the restoration of Dubari-kapi in 2001, and some 350,000 \$ US for other works in the Citadel. There are further funds available for the maintenance and repair of the 'Reserve of history, architecture and art' from the republican budget. The government of Dagestan reserves 100,000 rubles per year for the upkeep of monuments of history and culture.

There are series of training seminars on management issues, organised yearly for the chiefs of organisations and institutions responsible for conservation of cultural heritage.

The Citadel is visited daily by about 100 persons. In the summer season, there are some 10,000 visitors.

#### **Justification by the State Party (summary)**

The citadel, fortress structures and the ancient part of Derbent are an ensemble of structures of different designations integrated by a common historical and artistic background of the past culture of population that lived within city borders. The urban ensemble was united under architectural and urban traditions during a number of centuries. The a.m. city's integral parts and the city as a whole represent outstanding value of culture, history and artistic life that enriched European and Eastern civilizations.

The citadel, fortress structures and ancient Derbent altogether represent the following:

- **Criterion i:** a unique work of art, a masterpiece of creative genius of native population of this region;

- *Criterion ii*: big influence of Derbent architecture on development of art of monumental architecture and typological images in the art of construction culture of peoples of Eastern Caucasus in medieval times;

- *Criterion iii*: a thought that city stays an exclusively valuable witness of disappeared civilization;

- *Criterion iv*: monuments of medieval Derbent are outstanding structures of 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, typical specimens of Muslim culture of the Caucasus;

- *Criterion v*: the city of Derbent is a unique example of a traditional dwelling of a human being. It is a hub of defensive system on Eastern Caucasus, a centre of spreading of Islamic culture among peoples of this region; Derbent architecture existing during 14 centuries is a material evidence of long history of this area, a witness of penetration of Islamic ideas to territories of the Caucasus.

### 3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

#### *Actions by ICOMOS*

Due to administrative problems, an ICOMOS expert mission was only able to visit the nominated property in January-February 2003.

#### *Conservation*

##### *Conservation history:*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a large part of the southern defence wall and the lower part of the town, close to the Caspian Sea, were demolished to give place for new development. There were also some alterations in the north wall made by to accommodate windows and door openings for the buildings.

Research and restoration of the fortress have been going for several decades. Restoration of the monuments started in 1956, under the responsibility of the experts of Soviet Union. These works included the restoration of the fortress Narin-kala, four gates of the north and south walls; Kilsa-mesjid and Minaret mosque; the mausoleum of Tuti-Bike. Restoration has also been completed on some other buildings, as well as five sections of the north wall.

##### *State of conservation:*

The citadel area, the Narin, is basically an archaeological area, where most structures are in ruins. There have been some repairs and reconstructions using mainly traditional materials.

Regarding the defence walls, there are problems in the stability of the wall structures due to foundation failures and consequent cracks. There is organic growth, and problems caused by rain and thermal movements.

In the residential area of the town, Sharestan and Robot, most of the urban walls that divided the town into different sections have been lost. Only in the mosque area there still remains a dividing wall, which however is covered with cement. The remaining section of the historic town has retained its traditional fabric and the narrow, winding streets. Traffic is not controlled in the historic area. As a result, cars have caused damage to buildings, and the

narrow lanes are used for parking. The mosque and several other buildings have been repaired or restored. The baths are now in exhibition and museum use.

##### *Management:*

The Narin citadel area and its surroundings have been listed as a national monument by the Daghestan Republic, and are protected. The general master plan for the historic area has been approved by the city council, including norms and guidelines for protection and conservation. Any changes to the present situation therefore must be approved by the technical commission of the City Council.

The ICOMOS expert has observed that, while historic area is protected by the government, though there are economic pressures for construction particularly in the surrounding areas. This is particularly relevant to the buffer zone on the southern side of the old town. At the same time, the ICOMOS expert took note of the civic pride of the inhabitants and their wish to preserve the historic town.

##### *Risk analysis:*

The fortress structure is subject to various environmental problems: such as landslides, thermal movements causing cracking of walls and foundation failures. The impact of rain and sun facilitate the growth of grass and lichens, erosion of surface stones and mortars. The area has moderate earthquake problem. In recent years, the development and construction activities are also causing problems to the historic structures, including some destruction.

The buffer zone is subject to development pressures. Proper building control should be established here, so as to control the height of new buildings and keeping the character of the area homogeneous in relation to the historic district.

#### *Authenticity and integrity*

##### *Authenticity:*

Considering the long history of Derbent as a military defence structure, and accepting the loss of a part of the property, it has still preserved a good amount of authentic structures representing the different historic periods. The individual buildings, ie the defence walls, towers, gates, mosques and other public buildings have gone through changes dictated by use, but maintaining essential parts of historic fabric. The restorations in recent decades have been relatively limited, though the current structural conditions require further attention and consolidation.

##### *Integrity:*

The fortifications of Derbent retained their military function until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Until that time also the surrounding context remained in its natural condition. Since 1820, a part of the south wall has been demolished, as well as a large part of the medieval urban fabric. The city has developed along the Caspian seaside, in north-south direction, across the fortification walls. This has obviously meant a partial loss of the structural and visual integrity of the place as acquired over several centuries. Nevertheless, the remaining north wall, the citadel and the medieval town fabric with its public buildings have retained a great interest both architecturally

and historically. This is the case especially in the upper section of the town and the citadel, where the ancient structures dominate the landscape.

The residential area retains its medieval aspect, though it has been subject continuous transformation over depending on the needs of the inhabitants. The public buildings are mainly religious, and any service structures have been established in new parts of the city. A major interest in this area could be seen in the continuation of the traditional way of living, which obviously is challenged by modernisation.

### *Comparative evaluation*

When the Sasanians revived the Persian Empire after the Hellenistic-Parthian period; their main adversary in the west was the Roman Empire, and in the north the Nomadic tribes. The problem of the northern frontier was recognized also by the Romans who even sustained the Persian efforts to resist potential invasion from that direction. This fortified 'limes' formed a barrier over the mountains of the present-day Dagestan, where some 40 km still remain. The site of Derbent was critical for the boundary, and the walls actually entered some 500 m into the Caspian Sea to control sea traffic as well. The defence system continued on the eastern side of the Caspian Sea, across the Turkeman steppe. A popular reference of this wall is made to Alexander the Great. In 1937, E.F. Schmidt photographed it from the air noting that there remained some 170 km. There has also been recent archaeological work on this site. In any case, the fortifications of Derbent are the best preserved part of this 'limes'.

The Sasanian fortification system could be compared to the Roman limes (Hadrian's Wall, inscribed in 1987, criteria: ii, iii, iv), as well as the Great Wall of China (inscribed in 1987, criteria: i, ii, iii, iv, vi). Even though having a similar function, the Sasanian construction differs in terms of culture and type of construction. In the case of Derbent, furthermore, the question is about a gate structure and related town in a strategic point of north-south communication on the Caspian Sea. In relation to the other sites, it can be seen to have different though complementary qualities.

The Sasanians had strong defences in their towns and villages, and many of these were retained and re-used in the Islamic period. Structurally the walls of Derbent can be compared to other Sasanian constructions, such as those of Takht-e Suleiman in north-western Iran. It is noted that there exists a comprehensive study of the fortifications in Iran (published in 1998), as well as a comparative study by UNESCO of the military architecture in the geo-cultural region of Central and Southern Asia (1997).

While a part of the town of Derbent was rebuilt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there still remains the eastern section under the citadel on the mountain side. This historic centre could be compared with other towns in the region and particularly with the historic centre of Baku already inscribed on the World Heritage List (WH 2000, criterion: iv). This comparison regards particularly the single historic buildings. Considering that the historic development of Derbent was closely related to its defence function, it acquired a rather severe character. In this regard, it is distinguished from the other towns, which were more

oriented towards 'ordinary' life and activities. In fact, the value of the town should be seen as an element of the fortification system.

### *Outstanding universal value*

#### *General statement:*

The 'Citadel, Ancient City and Fortress buildings of Derbent' has been a boundary site at least since the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Its main significance and outstanding universal value can be seen in its role as part of a defence system, which was created by the Persian Empire retaining its strategic role until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This 'Persian limes' can be compared with the Roman limes (the Hadrian's Wall) and the Great Wall of China, which had a similar function. As a place for the control of a boundary, the town should be seen in this relation. The design and construction of these walls was a remarkable achievement, and the walls probably continued much further than the current ca 200 km.

While recognising the strategic role that Derbent continued to have in the Islamic period, its outstanding universal value can hardly be seen in the diffusion of Islam in the Caucasian region. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century, in particular, there were other centres which had this function, including Baku, not far from Derbent, as well as the Timurid capitals of Samarkand and Boukhara.

#### *Evaluation of criteria:*

- **Criterion i:** the nomination dossier refers to Derbent as a masterpiece of the creative genius of native population in this region. While recognising the local contribution in single structures, ICOMOS retains that the historical and strategic significance of Derbent should be seen in a much broader context. It is noted that this criterion was used in relation to the Great Wall of China, considering its size and the quality of construction. While recognising the similarity of these two sites, the Great Wall of China is far larger an undertaking, does not consider this criterion justified.

**Criterion ii:** while recognising the likely exchange of influences of Derbent in relation to the architecture of the Caucasus region, there is not enough evidence to justify outstanding universal value on this basis.

**Criterion iii:** the critical location of Derbent has made it a strategic place of control in the region, and the property bears exceptional archaeological and architectural evidence to the cultures that governed and inhabited the region over three millennia.

**Criterion iv:** while recognising the interest of Derbent in providing evidence to Muslim culture and architecture in the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, ICOMOS considers that the outstanding universal value of Derbent should be referred to it as an outstanding example of the defence structure which formed the northern limes to the Sasanian Empire. The military function of the site continued until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Criterion v:** the nomination dossier does not provide sufficient information to justify the claim of outstanding universal value in relation to continuous land use. A further study would be required to consider up to what point Derbent would qualify in this regard.

In conclusion, the outstanding universal value of the property is recommended on the basis of *criteria iii* and *iv*.

#### **4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### ***Recommendation for the future***

While recognizing the efforts made by the authorities to conserve the nominated property, special attention is drawn to the need to strengthen the implementation of management by providing the necessary financial and professional resources.

ICOMOS also recommends that the norms for new constructions in the areas surrounding the nominated property should be elaborated specifying the height, volume and architectural character in harmony with the historic area.

Furthermore, regarding the citadel area and the ancient defence structures, ICOMOS recommends that any reconstruction be strictly limited, following internationally accepted guidelines.

##### ***Recommendation with respect to inscription***

That the nominated property be inscribed on the basis of *criteria iii* and *iv*:

***Criterion iii:*** The site of the ancient city of Derbent has been crucial for the control of the north-south passage on the west side of the Caspian Sea since the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE. The defence structures that were built by the Sasanians in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE were in continuous use by the succeeding Persian, Arabic, Mongol, and Timurid governments for some 15 centuries.

***Criterion iv:*** The ancient city of Derbent and its defence structures are the most significant section of the strategic defence systems designed and built in the Sasanian empire along their northern limes, and maintained during the successive governments until the Russian occupation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

ICOMOS, March 2003