

Novodevichy (Russian Federation)

No 1097

1. BASIC DATA

State Party: The Russian Federation
Name of property: The Ensemble of the Novodevichy Convent
Location: The City of Moscow
Date received: 28 January 2003
Category of property:

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *monument*. The property was first presented as an extension to the 'Kremlin and Red Square, Moscow', inscribed in 1990 on the basis of criteria i, ii, iv and vi.

With a letter of 5 February 2004, the State Party stated that the nomination would no more be an extension but as its principal nomination.

Brief description:

The Novodevichy Convent, in south-western Moscow, was built in the 16th and 17th centuries, representing the so-called Moscow Baroque style. It formed a part of a chain of monastic ensembles forming part of the defence system of the city. The convent has been directly associated with the political, cultural, and religious history of Russia, and closely associated with the Moscow Kremlin.

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

The Novodevichy Convent is situated in the south-western part of the historic town of Moscow, close to the Moscow River. The Convent territory is enclosed within walls and surrounded by a park, which forms the buffer zone. The park is limited by the urban fabric of the city on the north and east sides. On the west side, it is limited by the Moscow River, and on the south side there is an urban freeway. The north-west shore of the lake offers picturesque panoramas that are important for the perception of the ensemble.

The Convent is surrounded by a high masonry wall with 12 towers. The entrances are from the north (town side) and the south. The Smolensky Cathedral, oriented west-east, is situated in the centre of the axes between the two entrance gates. The layout of the convent territory is an irregular rectangle stretched from the west to east. The ensemble of the convent is surrounded by a fortress wall with 12 towers. Originating from the 16th century, the dominating aspect of the ensemble was given by the 'Moscow baroque' style in the 17th century.

The layout of the Convent can be referred to two axes. The 'east-west' axis is formed by the Church of the Assumption and the Bell Tower. The 'north-south axis' is

defined by the two entrance gates. The North Gate is linked with the *Church of Transfiguration*, and the South Gate with the *Church of the Holy Virgin*. The *Refectory* and the *Church of St. Amvrosi* are close to the South Gate. The *Bell Tower* (1683-1690) is 72 m high in five tiers. It is built in red brick in 'Moscow baroque' style, using white-stone decorative elements. The Convent has a number of residential and service buildings, many along the walls. The unusual disposition of the Belfry on the far end of the east-west axis, near the eastern boundary, stresses its organic link with surrounding streets, and especially to the Moscow Kremlin. This aspect is stressed in the visual links and spatial orientation of its urban layout.

The Smolensky Cathedral, the main focal point of the Convent, is situated at the crossing of the two axes of the site, and is dedicated to Mother God of Smolensk (1524-25, paintings of 16th century and iconostas of 17th century). This was the first stone building of the ensemble, possibly designed by an Italian architect, and built in brick masonry and stone details. The building has three aisles ending in three apses; it is surrounded by two-tier galleries and crowned by five cupolas. The outer walls are plastered white and articulated vertically into sections each of which ends up with a semicircle on the roof line. The interior is covered by a system of cross-vaulting and domes on light drums. The interior walls, pillars and vaults are covered with mural paintings on a tempera base. The main theme of the paintings is 'Akaphist's text praising the Virgin', made in a style tending toward classical ancient Russian style. The wooden framed iconostasis, decorated in gold-coated carvings, typical for 'Moscow baroque'; it has icons of the 16th and 17th centuries.

The Church of St. Amvrosiy Mediolanskiy with Old Refectory and Irininskiye chambers (late 16th to 17th centuries) comprise three main volumes made in brick. This complex, in one and two storeys, is fairly simple in its general architectural expression. The church façade has typical decorative details of the 17th century. *The Church of Assumption of the Virgin and Refectory* (1685-87) is built in brick in 'Moscow baroque' style. It is mainly in one storey with low roof line, except for a tower part, crowned with a small onion-form cupola. It has three entrances porches projecting from the building. The interior has painted decorations and iconostasis that date from 17th to 20th centuries.

History

The Novodevichy Convent was founded by Grand Duke Vasiliy III in the 1520s to mark the liberation of Smolensk and returning it to the Russian State in 1514. The Convent was dedicated to the Icon of the Mother God of Smolensk 'Hodigitria', the highest shrine of Russian orthodoxy. The Cathedral of the Convent was built in the honour of this Icon. The Convent also became one of the most respected and rich nunneries, joined by women of tsarist and boyar families. It was called Novodevichy ('The Virgin Hodigitria New Maiden') to differ from the Ascension Convent, Voznesensky Starodevichy ('Old Maiden'), in the Moscow Kremlin. There were other associations between these two ensembles. Novodevichy was used as an alternative residence for tsarist family. The cathedral of Novodevichy and the cathedrals of the Kremlin were the two sites used as burial places for the ruling dynasty in the

16th and 17th centuries. The location of the convent at the crossing of the river on the access road to Moscow contributed to give Novodevichy an important defence function as well. This historical road, furthermore, became an important element in the development of planning of the city. Such symbolic and physical relationship with Kremlin also gave an impact to the spatial arrangement of Novodevichy itself, eg in the position of the Bell Tower.

The end of the 16th century was active for the Convent related with the coronation of Boris Godunov, and his sister Tsarina Irina taking monastic votes. This is the period for the construction of the surrounding stone walls with towers. Toward the end of the 17th century, there was another period, which resulted in the construction of new buildings. During this period, princess Sofia Alekseevna assisted her brother Fedor to govern the country. After his death she continued to govern for seven more years. During this time, she kept her residence in Novodevichy. The walls and towers were now rebuilt, partly using the old masonry, and decorated with elaborate crowns in red brick, reflecting the 'Moscow baroque' style. The earlier buildings were also adapted to the same style.

The Necropolis of the Convent was initiated in the 16th century. The cathedral served as burial place for women of the tsarist and ruling families. The cemetery around the cathedral was used for nobility and honourable citizens. In 1898-1904, a new cemetery was established outside the south wall, a burial place of the most eminent Russian intellectuals, and political and military figures.

After the October Revolution, in 1922, the Convent was closed, and it became the 'Museum of emancipation of woman'. It was later reorganised as the historical and art museum of 'The Novodevichy Convent'. At present this is affiliated to the State Historical Museum of Kremlin. The collections of Novodevichy contain a large number of precious objects and paintings, as well as an important library, related to the life of the tsarist dynasties and the history of the country, thus becoming a complement to the Kremlin. Since 1980 Novodevichy Convent is a residence of a Metropolitan, and in 1994 a nunnery has again been introduced there.

Management regime

Legal provision:

The Convent is owned by the Russian Federation. The ensemble is legally protected as a monument of architecture and of archaeology of federal significance (latest order: N° 176/1995).

A new Federal Law on Cultural Heritage has been approved by the State Duma and signed by the President of the Russian Federation in 2002.

The buffer zone, the park surrounding the convent, is part of the protective zone of the Novodevichy Convent, which extends toward the north covering the main street with adjacent buildings (ca 2300 m long and 200-300 m wide).

Management structure:

The responsibility for the management is shared by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Property Relations of the Russian Federation, the State

Historical Museum, the Chief Administration of Protection of Monuments of the City of Moscow.

There exists the 'programme of museumification of the property 2000-2005', and 'the plan-scheme of realisation of conducting of repair and restoration works on objects of the property and their financing'.

Resources:

The ensemble is conserved and managed from the State budget and using the expertise of the state conservation authorities.

There are over 100,000 visitors per year.

Justification by the State Party (summary)

The Novodevichy Convent ensemble is a work of ancient Russian art of building, which is unique in style, composition and perfect shape. It is the only ancient Russian convent, which is both a fortress-convent and a front, tsars' ensemble, intended for staying, although not usual, of the highest class women. Being finally completed in the last third of the 17th century the architectural ensemble of the convent possesses the form that has no counterparts in the art of building of Russia and other 'Moscow baroque' examples. It is one of the most perfect models of this architectural approach and, at the same time, the only example of the implementation of such an ensemble.

Criterion i: The Novodevichy Convent is a unique work of ancient Russian art of building, painting, arts and crafts. Authentic and integral architectural-artistic ensemble is of exclusive town-planning value.

Criterion iv: The Novodevichy Convent ensemble is an outstanding example of 'Moscow baroque' architecture of the last third of the 17th century, which preserved authentic integral appearance of the convent ensemble.

Criterion vi: The Novodevichy Convent ensemble is one of the most important historical centers of Orthodoxy, associated with the most notorious event and actors of the Russian history of 16th-17th centuries.

3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

Actions by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the site in October 2003.

As a result of the State Party to change the nomination from an extension to its principal nomination, ICOMOS has revised its evaluation accordingly.

Conservation

Conservation history:

The convent-function of the ensemble ended in 1922, after which it was used as museum. It has fortunately been preserved without losses or damages through periods that saw much destruction especially of religious properties.

The ensemble has been subject to conservation and restoration starting in the 1960s. The Smolensk Cathedral was restored in 1971-75, including its wall paintings. Several buildings were restored in the 1970s and 1980s, including the Church of St. Amvrosy Mediolansky with Refectory and Tsarina Irina Chambers, Treasury and Ward Chambers. The Belfry was restored in 1979. In 1998, the roofs of the convent buildings and the cemetery were affected by a storm, and restored the following year.

State of conservation:

The complex is generally in a good state of preservation. The structures of all the buildings are healthy; the walls are stable and dry. The basis of the current work is a complex conservation programme. It encompasses works strictly connected with conservation, adapting the interiors to new functions, as well as improving the management and use of the whole ensemble. Particular attention is given to the protection of important old trees (as 'monuments of nature') as well the improving the roads and paths for the visitors. The conservation work serves as a 'laboratory' where Russian conservation students are trained, including courses and seminars, in part under the aegis of the UNESCO chair, which has its headquarters in the monastic complex.

Management:

The complex is fully legally protected.

The southeast part of the originally proposed buffer zone contains no historic buildings. However, the zone is considered too narrow to provide sufficient protection to the convent from encroachment of high-rise buildings. Close by, within a housing estate, there are already some eight-floor blocks of flats erected after the Second World War. The State Party has agreed to extend the buffer zone to include the whole housing estate, so as to guarantee that the convent ensemble keeps its dominating position in the area. Along the street leading from the Novodevichy convent to the Moscow Kremlin, there is a number of listed historic buildings, each with its buffer zone. As a consequence, the entire street is under protection.

Novodevichy convent has a management plan which covers all the principle areas. The conservation work is being carried out according to a planned programme and schedule. Financing is assured from the state budget. The current and future role of the museums connected with cultural tourism is part of the programme of the Moscow State Historical Museum also supported by state funds. The religious functions of the site are looked after by the Moscow Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Risk analysis:

The main problems come from air pollution and the traffic flow that passes close to the southern wall.

Being within a large city, the position of the ensemble in the cityscape will obviously require continuous monitoring. The buffer zone with the proposed modification is seen as adequate, but the situation needs continuous monitoring in the future.

Authenticity and integrity

The Novodevichy convent is considered to pass the test of authenticity. The complex is integrally preserved. During its history, it has not undergone destruction or rebuilding, and preserves its general layout as well as the individual buildings. It has also been returned to a function close to its original one. The sacral buildings today fulfil a liturgical function, the monastic structures are inhabited by monks and the ostentatious residential buildings now fulfil cultural functions as museum. The ensemble has been subject to restoration in the late 20th century, but this has not involved replication.

Comparative evaluation

A characteristic feature of the historic layout of Moscow (the historic town surrounded by a ring of defensive walls in the centre of which was the seat of the Tsars – the fortress of the Kremlin) was the strengthening of the defence of the town by situating a network of eight monasteries with defence function around it. These formed a half-circle outside the city (including: Donskoy, Danilov, Simonov, Novospassky and Andronikov). None of these sites however represent the culmination and integrity of the Moscow baroque style as in the ensemble of Novodevichy Convent.

Several structures of the same stylistic trend in Moscow and near Moscow (the Church of Trinity in Troitse-Lykovo, the Church of the Intercession in Fili, the Church of Boris and Gleb in Zuzino and several others) present good examples of single structures, but Novodevichy Convent forms an integral "baroque landscape" in the Moscow style. The main church of the convent architecturally demonstrates the political presence of the State. Externally it shows similarity to the Kremlin Cathedral, in the articulation of the walls into vertical sections, in the architecture frieze with colonnades and in the cathedral's five domes, though in details it has its own identity.

Outstanding universal value

General statement:

The historical significance of the complex is linked with the direct relationship of the convent with the Moscow Kremlin. It arose as its 'satellite' being the residence and the place of burial of the members of the Tsar's family and entourage. An especially grandiose road, the 'Tsar's road' linked the Kremlin with the convent. At the same time, the convent of Novodevichy also has outstanding universal value on its own. This is reflected in its political and architectural significance. It was built as a fortified convent ensemble with strong political connotations and it was closely associated with the government of Russia.

The elite nature of the convent means that it contains examples of the highest class of architecture with rich interiors. In contrast with the other monasteries in Moscow, which underwent rebuilding affecting their artistic integrity, Novodevichy has retained its integrity, largely dating from the 17th century and being the most representative example of the 'Moscow Baroque' style.

Moscow Baroque was a stylistic trend in the architecture in the region of Moscow from the late 17th to early 18th centuries. The style is characterised by a particular system in the disposition of architectural masses, combination of splendid white stone decor and detailing against flat surfaces. It can be seen as an interpretation of western European baroque elements and architectural order in this particular cultural context.

While the rest of the monasteries of Moscow fell victim to Bolshevik atheism and vandalism, the Novodevichy Convent was made state property and adapted to a museum use. Later the complex became a historical and art museum, affiliated to the State Historical Museum of the Kremlin. The Novodevichy Convent is one of the most important historical monuments in Moscow and an important example of the defended female monastic house so characteristic of ancient Russia.

Evaluation of criteria:

Criterion i: The Novodevichy Convent is the most outstanding example of the so-called 'Moscow Baroque', which became a fashionable style in the region of Moscow. Apart from its fine architecture and decorative details, the site is characterised by its town-planning values.

Criterion iv: The Novodevichy Convent is an outstanding example of an exceptionally well preserved monastic complex, representing particularly the 'Moscow baroque' style in the architecture of the late 17th century.

Criterion vi: The Novodevichy Convent ensemble integrates the political and cultural nature of the existing World Heritage site of Moscow Kremlin. It is itself closely related to Russian Orthodoxy, as well as with the Russian history especially in the 16th and 17th centuries.

4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation with respect to inscription

That the property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of ***criteria i, iv and vi:***

Criterion i: The Novodevichy Convent is the most outstanding example of the so-called 'Moscow Baroque', which became a fashionable style in the region of Moscow. Apart from its fine architecture and decorative details, the site is characterised by its town-planning values.

Criterion iv: The Novodevichy Convent is an outstanding example of an exceptionally well preserved monastic complex, representing particularly the 'Moscow baroque' style in the architecture of the late 17th century.

Criterion vi: The Novodevichy Convent ensemble integrates the political and cultural nature of the existing World Heritage site of Moscow Kremlin. It is itself closely related to Russian Orthodoxy, as well as with the Russian history especially in the 16th and 17th centuries.

ICOMOS, March 2004