Radziwill complex (Belarus)  
No 1196

1. BASIC DATA

State Party: Republic of Belarus

Name of property: Architectural, Residential and Cultural Complex of the Radziwill Family at Nesvizh

Location: The city of Nesvizh, Oblast Minsk

Date received: 30 January 2004

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.

Brief description:

The Architectural, Residential and Cultural Complex of the Radziwill Family at Nesvizh is located in central Belarus. The Radziwill dynasty, who built and kept the ensemble from the 16th century till 1939, represents some of the most important personalities in the European history and culture. Due to their efforts Nesvizh became a crucial point of influences in the different fields of culture, science, arts, crafts and architecture. The palaces of the complex as well as the Corpus Christy Church became important prototypes generating artistic and architectural influences in all central Europe and Russia.

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

The ensemble built and occupied by the Radziwill family from the 16th to 20th centuries is located in the town of Nesvizh, in the province of Minsk, in central Belarus. It consists of the residence castle and the mausoleum church of Corpus Christy with their setting. The castle has ten interconnected buildings, including the palace, the galleries, the residence, and the arsenal, which developed as one architectural whole around a six-sided courtyard. The buildings are set within the remains of the 16th-century fortifications that comprise four bastions and four curtain walls in a rectangular plan, surrounded by a ditch. Via a dam, the castle is connected to the Corpus Christy Church, which forms a block of the urban area of Nesvizh. The ensemble is in the middle of a cultural landscape that has various design components. The boundaries of the nominated area cover an elongated territory with the main axe parallel to the Usha river-bed and water front.

The castle is oriented from west to east. The entrance is from the west through the Gate building, the lower part of which is embedded in the rampart. It has an octagonal two-storey gate tower, topped with a helm. The original structure dates from the 16th century. The first floor and the tower were added in the 18th century. The principal building of the complex is the Palace, which occupies the centre of the east side of the inner yard. It also dates from the 16th century, and was enlarged in the 18th century. This is a three-storey building on a nearly square floor plan. The corners are strengthened by four octagonal towers with alcoves. The façade is decorated by stucco work by Antoni Zaleski. The ground floor, originally used as treasury, has preserved the 16th-century vaults. The main staircase is decorated by the representation of “Aurora” in the 18th century by Franciszek Smuglewicz. On the first floor the interiors date from the 18th and 19th centuries. The south side of the court has the three-storey Residence building, built in the 16th century, with a tower. The north side has a corresponding Arsenal building, which also used to house a chapel. These are connected to the Palace via gallery structures, which cut the corners of the court. The court is then closed by annexes that connect these buildings to the Gate structure.

Corpus Christy Church lies in the eastern part of the town of Nesvizh, next to the street leading to the castle. The plan of the building is based on a Latin cross, with an elongated rectangular body from which project two lateral chapels with five sides and an apsidal chancel. At the crossing of the nave and the transept there is dome. The side chapels are roofed with domes without lanterns. Amongst the most valuable fittings are the tomb of Ksawery D. Heski from 1852-53. The two-storey façade is divided by a prominent entablature, slightly offset on the axes of the pilasters and topped with a triangular gable. Under the church there is a crypt with the coffins of 72 members of the Radziwill family, dating from the 16th to 20th centuries. The church is surrounded by an 18th-century boundary wall.

History

Historically, Belarus is a trans-boundary place in the European context. Its territory was consecutively part of: the Kievan Russia and Russian Mediaeval Principalities (10th - 13th c.); the Great Duchy of Lithuania (14th c.); the united Polish-Lithuanian state, Republic of Rzeczpospolita (1569-1795); the Russian Empire (1772/1795 - 1917); Poland (for Western Byelorussia, 1921-1939); USSR as Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (from 1922); and the Republic of Belarus (from 1991). Due to these circumstances the territory of Belarus was at historical, cultural, artistic, political, military and religious (Calvinism, Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Uniat church, Judaism) crossroads between the East and West.

The Radziwill dynasty, to whom the Nesvizh residence belonged from 1523 to 1939, represents some of the most notable personalities in the European history and culture since the 15th century. The Radziwill landlords governed the territory of the former Rzeczpospolita (now Belarus) and they were the Princes of the Holy Roman Empire since 1518.

The first confirmed records of Nesvizh date from the 15th century. From 1513, it belonged to the Radziwills, who lived here until 1939. Before the castle, there was a manor house, inhabited by Duke Mikolaj Radziwill, the chancellor of Lithuania and voivoda of Vilnius. The duke
was protestant, which made Nesvizh an important centre of the Reformation. The first catechism in Belarusian language was printed in the ducal press.

The first phase of the Castle dates from 1582-1604, when Mikolaj Radziwill started the construction of a new seat. It is shown with bastioned fortifications in a drawing of 1604 by T. Makowski (“Nesvisium”). The Residence has survived practically in the original form until the present, while the other parts have been altered or added to later. The galleries were constructed in 1650.

In 1706, the Castle was occupied by the Swedes, who destroyed the fortifications. After their departure, the Castle was renovated by Michal Radziwill in 1732-58, who used architects from Germany, Italy, Poland and Belarus.

In the 19th century, the castle remained uninhabited until the ownership passed to Antoni Radziwill and his French wife Maria de Castellane, who renovated the interiors in 1881-86. They also added a terrace with Neo-Gothic turrets against the palace. They also designed and built the romantic landscape park around the castle complex (1878-1911). After 1939, it was first taken over by the Soviet army, and subsequently the Germans used it as military hospital. From 1945 to 2001, it was used as a sanatorium. Since then it has been subject to restoration and adaptation to use as museum and as a cultural and visitor centre. In 2002, a fire destroyed the upper part of the residence and a part of the gallery, which were rebuilt in 2003.

Management structure

Legal provision:

Belarus, as one of the former USSR Republics, is a young independent state with its own new legislation. Earlier the nominated property was managed by the former Soviet legal system. In 1992 Belarus acquired its own Law on Protection of historical and cultural heritage, which defined the legal status of the nominated property within new political and social reality of the independent state. To this can be added several other laws regulating the protection of cultural heritage in Belarus, as well as specific resolutions by the Council of Ministers regarding the protection of cultural heritage in Nesvizh, and particularly the establishment of the National Historical and Cultural Reserve “Nesvizh” as museum and protection zones (1994, 1996). The statutes of this institution were approved in 2001. The resolution of 2003 set up the Nesvizh-Mir Cultural Tourism Zone.

Management structure:

There are three principal levels of administration: national, regional and department (or local), which are directly involved into the management process of the nominated property. At the national level, there is the Ministry of Culture and the Department on Protection of Historical and Cultural Heritage and Restoration, as well as the National Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve “Nesvizh” subordinated to the Ministry of Culture, which also acts at the site level. These form the basic control and management mechanisms, assisted by specialised professional institutions. At the regional level there is Nesvizh Region Executive Committee, and at the local level: The Direction of the National Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve “Nesvizh”, Ecclesiastical Council of the Corpus Christi Parish Church, and The Department of the Head Architect of the Nesvizh Region acting as one of the main local participants of conservation process.

Resources:

The main financing comes from the state budget, complemented by Roman-Catholic parish for the church-mausoleum.

Justification by the State Party (summary)

Criterion ii: The Radziwill complex is a unique masterpiece of the Central and Eastern European region. Erected at the end of the 16th century, it had extensive influence on the development of residential and sacral architecture in Belarus, Poland and Lithuania over the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. The buildings of the complex, consisting of the castle, the palazzo in fortezza, the church-mausoleum, were the first of their type of buildings, and exercised considerable influence in Central and Eastern Europe.

Nesvizh was an international centre, attracting craftsmen from various parts of Europe to be trained here, from the end of the 16th century, taking the learnt skills back to their home region.

Criterion iv: The architectural and cultural-residential complex of the Radziwill family as it developed in the 16th century is a reflection and a result of a very important stage in the development of architecture, culture and civilisation in the Eastern and Central Europe. The development of the Radziwill family complex was a result of social and artistic changes which took place in this part of Europe. The 16th century was the age of formation of a new social class, the aristocracy, to which the Radziwills also belonged. The characteristic feature of this century was a development of representative domiciles which served as centres of culture.

Criterion vi: The continuous support of Radziwills to activities in various spheres of science and culture resulted in important achievements that had a strong impact in Belarus, Lithuania and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Nesvizh played an important part in the development of the literature and printing in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. … The documentary heritage of the Nesvizh estate is unique because of its composition and history. The books of the library originated from practically all European printing houses of the period from the 15th to the first half of the 20th centuries. … A map of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the so-called Radziwill map, was of particular significance to Central European cartography… It was the first map in the history of cartography to give a true picture of the entire territory of Belarus and Lithuania … Nesvizh became an important centre for the production of graphic arts. … Since the 17th century, Nesvizh was a centre of artistic culture competing with European music and theatre capitals. … Nesvizh constituted a place in which, at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, an international crafts centre was created by craftsmen who came here from various parts of Europe.
3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

Actions by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the site in September 2004. Subsequently, the State Party decided to reformulate the nomination revising the nominated core zone and buffer zone, and providing additional information on the cultural-historical significance of the property. The revised nomination also includes an in-depth comparative study.

Conservation

Conservation history:

After a period of neglect, the castle complex was renovated in the late 19th century. It remained in the ownership of the Radziwill family until 1939, after which it was used as a military hospital and then as a sanatorium until 2001. In the post-war period, the complex was subject to a series of restorations; the Corpus Christy Church was repaired after war damage. There were improvements in the park clearing the vegetation. In 1985-1991, there was an extensive restoration project in the park and pond territory under the supervision of leading scientific institutions of the Belarus Academy of Sciences.

From mid 1990s, there has been a new phase with the establishment of the National Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve “Nesvizh”, the special Decree on the restoration of the Castle (1997), and the international intellectual campaign on the conservation of the whole ensemble. Since 2001 the property has been under restoration as a cultural and visitor centre. In 2002, a fire destroyed the upper part of the residence and a part of the gallery, which were rebuilt in 2003.

State of conservation:

The Church has recently been examined in collaboration with Lithuanian and Polish experts (1999-2000). The reports note the necessity to regulate the water-table, drainage and ventilation of the foundations and underground spaces. The sarcophagi need cleaning and conservation. Some of these works are in progress. There is a need for the conservation of mural paintings and maintenance of the Church interiors. The urban area adjacent to the Church, including the main square with the Town-Hall, is part of the buffer zone and is well treated.

The Castle area has been under restoration since 2001. The works include archaeological research and excavations, restoration probes, repair of drainage system and hydraulic seal, structural consolidation, roof renovation, repair of heating system, installation of fire protection sensors, conservation of interior paintings, plafond frescoes, etc. These works include also a certain amount of reconstruction of lost features. The first stage of the programme should be finished by 2006 to allow for the museum exhibits to be installed and give access to visitors. The Museum-Reserve “Nesvizh” has prepared a detailed programme for the use of the Palace.

Management:

Generally speaking, the management system is considered adequate for the property. However, it is necessary to review the policy of restoration and reconstruction in line with the requirements of the World Heritage policies. This concern is also relevant to the park and the surrounding landscape.

Risk analysis:

The principal risk for the property is fire. After 2002, the property is continuously monitored in this regard.

There are no particular natural hazards in this region.

While the urban area is not under any special development pressures, the changes in the past fifty years have altered the historic urban fabric. Considering the importance of the setting to the nominated property, continuous monitoring is required to avoid similar problems in the future.

Authenticity and integrity

In the history of the Radziwill complex in Nesvizh, there can be identified three construction periods, i.e. the foundation in the 16th century, and the renovations in the 18th and late 19th centuries. The overall integrity and historical authenticity of the complex have been maintained. The ICOMOS expert expressed concern about some unjustified reconstruction (e.g. the bell tower). The fortifications were destroyed in the 17th century.

The present form of the landscape park with its romantic features dates mainly from the 19th century. It has suffered from neglect, though it has also been subject to some clearing and replanting in recent decades. As a whole, the landscape has maintained all the essential components, especially in the immediate surroundings of the castle and Corpus Christy Church, partly included in the core zone, partly in the buffer zone.

Comparative evaluation

The Radziwill complex at Nesvizh has no direct comparison in Belarus. The Corpus Christy Church, designed by the Italian architect Gian Maria Bernardoni (1541-1605) and built in 1587-93, was second only to the mother church of the Jesuits in Rome (work by Vignola and della Porta, 1568-75). This building and its architectural solutions influenced greatly the architecture of the 17th century. Churches, such as the Uniat Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Jesuit Cathedral of Jesus, St. Mary and St. Barbara, Orthodox Church of Peter and Paul in Minsk or St. Nicola Church by Bernardoni at Mir, are of later date and not comparable to the Nesvizh Church in the unity of inner decorum and rarity of burial complex. This is the case also with the 17th-century Jesuit Cathedrals in Grodno, Pinsk, Mogilev or Uniat St. Sophia Cathedral in Grodno. The early 17th-century Jesuit Church of St. Peter and Paul in Krakow (by Bernardoni) and the Bernardine Cathedral in Grodno.

As for the residence, the comparative analysis presented in the nomination shows the significance and architectural evolution of the Castle and Palace complex in the European context. This shows the germination of the “Mediaeval archetype” into the Renaissance-Baroque residential model (joining German, French, Italian and local roots). In this context, the Nesvizh Castle with its water system and parks acquire the features of a real architectural and engineering phenomenon in the Central and Eastern Europe. The Radziwill complex presents an important stage in development of the building typology. It played a pioneer role in architectural history of
Byelorussia and on all territory of the Eastern and Central Europe. It was also significant that this archetype was cut off the urban environment and put into a landscape setting.

**Outstanding universal value**

**General statement:**

Historically, Belarus occupied a trans-boundary position in the European context, becoming a crossroads of the influences from the east and the west. The members of the Radziwill family were key political, military and Church leaders, Enlighteners, Patrons of Arts, collectors, travellers, historians, writers, composers, manufacturers and builders. They have significantly influenced architecture, painting, literature, book printing, cartography, crafts, stage performance and other fields, playing an outstanding role in formation of Byelorussian, Polish, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian culture and spreading their impact internationally. The scientific, literary, and archival sources on the Radziwills and their own collections, libraries and archives are impressive. In this respect, the direct historical role of the Radziwills and Nesvizh for Central and Eastern Europe can be compared, for instance, with that of Medici or Sforza in the West. Even though relatively modest in scale, Nesvizh was an embodiment of prosperity and enlightened energy, an important cultural and international centre, which played fundamental role in establishing national identity. The physical presence of the Radziwills’ remains in situ with the 72 coffins and sarcophagi of the Corpus Christy Church-Mausoleum. This is the spiritual core of the nomination.

As a result of the cultural influences, the Radziwill complex, the residence castle and the Corpus Christy Church with its sepulchral function in Nesvizh, became an important focal point for the canalisation of influences across this part of Europe. The Radziwill family invited important cultural personalities, architects, artists and craftpersons, who introduced the latest innovations from the international context, becoming seminal in the introduction of such trends in Central and Eastern Europe.

**Evaluation of criteria:**

The property has been nominated on the basis of three criteria ii, iv and vi.

**Criterion ii:** The Radziwill family was a cultural and political focal point from the 16th to 19th centuries, and had an exceptionally important impact on the central and eastern part of Europe in particular, but also internationally. These influences are reflected in the architecture of the ensemble, and especially in the Corpus Christy Church. Nesvizh and Byelorussia were at the cradle for inoculation of new concepts based on synthesis of the Western traditions and led to the establishment of a new regional architectural school, which influenced Byelorussia, Poland, Lithuanian, Ukraine, and Russia.

**Criterion iv:** The Radziwill complex represents an important stage in development of the building typology. It played a pioneer role in architectural history of Byelorussia and on all territory of the Eastern and Central Europe. This is referred to the fortified castle and palace as the earliest Renaissance complex; Corpus Christi Church of the mid 16th c. as the first Jesuit temple [second after Il Gesu in Rome] and the first cupola basilica with Baroque façade. Important was also that this archetype was cut off the urban environment and put into a landscape setting.

The Corpus Christi Church at Nesvizh (1587-1593) with its precious sepulchral function is the most significant architectural chain of the nomination. It is of fundamental importance for Byelorussian culture, the first Baroque piece of art in Rzeczpopolita and a sign of the New Times for the whole East-Central Europe. This church launched the generic series of cross-cupola basilicas on the vast territories and influenced even the Orthodox churches that were built with a Jesuit plan (for instance, 17th c. All Souls Orthodox Cathedral in Vilnius as part of the WH site). The late Baroque frescoes by Heski of 1763 and sculptural decorum harmoniously accomplish its spatial qualities.

**Criterion vi:** The Architectural, Residential and Cultural complex of the Radziwill Family at Nesvizh is also considered to correspond to criterion vi. It has outstanding significance being associated with ideas and artistic works for which the Radziwill family was an important promoter. Furthermore, the nomination is linked with the personality of Gian Maria Bernardoni (1541-1605) – excellent Italian architect of the second half of Cinquecento. He was a practising Jesuit architect with a wide range of scientific interests (as Andrea Pozzo, Giuseppe Valeriano and others) and he left an outstanding trace in Byelorussian architectural history. Bernardoni was a brilliant connoisseur and interpreter of architectural treatises (Serlio, Vignola, Palladio, Cataneo, Blum and others) and a master of their innovative application to different cultural contexts and traditions – in Italy, Byelorussia, and Poland.

4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation with respect to inscription**

ICOMOS recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopt the following draft decision:

The World Heritage Committee,
1. Having examined Document WHC-05/29.COM/8B,
2. Inscribes the property on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria ii, iv and vi:

**Criterion ii:** The architectural, residential and cultural complex of the Radziwill family at Nesvizh was the cradle for inoculation of new concepts based on the synthesis of the Western traditions, leading to the establishment of a new architectural school in Central Europe.

**Criterion iv:** The Radziwill complex represents an important stage in development of building typology in the history of architecture of the Central Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. This concerned particularly the Corpus Christi Church with its typology related to cross-cupola basilica.

**Criterion vi:** The Radziwill family was particularly significant for being associated with the interpretation of the influences from Southern and Western Europe and the transmission of the ideas in the Central and Eastern Europe.

ICOMOS, April 2005
Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property
The castle

The park