

Bamiyan Valley (Afghanistan)

No 208 rev

1. BASIC DATA

<i>State Party:</i>	Afghanistan
<i>Name of property:</i>	Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley
<i>Location:</i>	Bamiyan Province, Bamiyan District
<i>Date received:</i>	19 May 2003
<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*, and it is a serial nomination. In terms of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention this is: a cultural landscape.

Brief description:

The cultural landscape and archaeological remains of the Bamiyan Valley represent the particular artistic and religious developments from the 1st to the 13th centuries in the ancient Bakhtria, integrating various cultural influences into the Gandhara school of Buddhist art. The area contains numerous Buddhist monastic ensembles and sanctuaries, as well as fortified settlements from the Islamic period. The site is also testimony to the tragic destruction of the two standing Buddha statues by the Taliban in March 2001, which shook the world.

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

Bamiyan Valley is situated some 246km by road west of Kabul, enclosed between the high mountains of Hindu Kush (Khawaja Ghar and Kuh-e Baba), in the central highlands of Afghanistan. The valley follows the Bamiyan River, and was the track of branch of the Silk Roads. The valley is situated in a large tectonic basin, which is ca 50km long and 15km wide, at an altitude of 2500m. The rocks are of conglomerate smoothly rubbed stone forming a long stretch of cliffs. The site is a landscape of great beauty, and was also associated with legendary figures. These aspects contributed to its development as a major religious and cultural centre. It was inhabited and partly urbanised from the 3rd century BCE.

The nominated site consists of 8 separate core zones, each with its buffer zone:

- *Bamiyan Cliff*, incl. two large standing Buddha figures;

- *Kakrak Valley*, ca 3km east of the previous;
- *Fuladi Valley*: *Qoul-i Akram* and *Kalai Ghamai Caves*;
- *Shahr-i Zuhak* includes a fortress of the Islamic period;
- *Qallai Kaphari Monuments*, Clusters A and B;
- *Shahr-i- Ghulghulah*, a fortified settlement.

Bamiyan Cliff is located on the north side of the valley, and includes the two colossal niches that contained the large standing Buddha figures (55m and 38m), dating from 3rd to 5th century CE, one of the them the tallest in the world. They were destroyed by the Taliban in March 2001. In 16th century CE, the site is reported to have contained some 12,000 caves, forming a large ensemble of Buddhist monasteries, chapels and sanctuaries, along the foothills of the valley. A preliminary geophysical exploration in 2002 has indicated the presence of ancient roads and wall structures. In several of the caves and niches, often linked with communicating galleries, there are remains of wall paintings. There are also remains of seated Buddha figures.

Kakrak Valley caves are situated ca 3km southeast of the Bamiyan Cliff, and consist of over a hundred caves, dating from 6th to 13th centuries. There are fragments remaining of a 10m tall standing Buddha figure and of a sanctuary with painted decorations from the Sasanian period.

Fuladi Valley caves: are located ca 2km southwest from the Bamiyan Cliff. The two main groups of caves are Qoul-i Akram Caves and Kalai Ghamai Caves, which have important decorative features.

Shahr-i Zuhak, ca 15km east of Bamiyan Cliff, relates mainly to the Islamic period under the rule of Ghaznavid and Ghorid dynasties (10th to 13th cent. CE), though the origins of the fortress of Shar-i Zuhak go back to 6th - 7th cent. CE.

Qallai Kaphari monuments are situated 12km east of the Bamiyan Cliff, in two clusters (A and B), consisting of fortification walls, towers and citadels, built in earthen structures. They date mainly from 6th – 8th cent. CE.

Shahr-i Ghulghulah is a fortified citadel situated on a hill in the centre of the Bamiyan Valley, and dates from 6th to 10th cent. CE.

History

Afghanistan was the ancient Bactria, one of the provinces of the Persian Empire under the Achaemenids. The region was then ruled by Alexander the Great, the Seleucid dynasty, and the Maurya dynasty of northern India. The Kushans, a group of nomadic tribes, ruled from the 2nd century BCE, reaching the climax in the 2nd cent. CE. The Sasanians controlled Afghanistan from the mid 3rd century, Central Asian nomads ruled in the 5th century; a coalition of Sasanians and Western Turks took the power in mid 6th century. The Silk Roads passed through Afghanistan, and contributed to the diffusion of Buddhism from India in this region in the 1st century CE. The Kushans were patrons of

the arts and religion, and were responsible for the introduction of Buddhist art in the Bactrian style, which was influenced by Hellenistic art, and the Sasanians.

Islamic art and architecture were introduced to Bamiyan in the 11th century CE, when the central part of Afghanistan was under the rule of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (998-1030). The town of Bamiyan was designed on the model of the Khorassan region of Iran. Under the rule of the Ghurids (1155-1212) the development included the fortified settlements of Shahr-i Bamiyan (later Ghulghulah), Shahr-i Zuhak and Shahr-i Khoshak. The army of Genghis Khan ruined the town of Bamiyan and looted the Buddhist monasteries in the early 13th century. The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1618-1707) ordered his army to shoot off the legs of the large Buddha. The valley was abandoned for a long period, but at the end of the 19th century, the caves were inhabited and used as shelters for domestic animals. In 1979, there were over 7,000 inhabitants in the Bamiyan town. From the 1970s, the area was used by the military. In the 1990s, it was exposed to armed conflicts. In 2001, the large Buddha statues were destroyed by the Taliban.

Management regime

Legal provision:

The monuments and archaeological remains of Bamiyan Valley are public property, owned by the State of Afghanistan. However, large parts of the buffer zone are in private ownership. The documents defining the ownerships were destroyed during the Taliban rule, and are now being re-established.

The State Law on the Conservation of Historical and Cultural Properties, dating 1980, is still in force, and provides the basis for financial and technical resources. Similarly, the legal framework is currently under review by the government.

Management structure:

The management of the nominated sites is under the authority of the Ministry of Information and Culture, Institute of Archaeology and the Department of the Preservation of Historical Monuments, as well as the Governor of the Bamiyan Province.

The Ministry of Information and Culture has a provincial local office representative in Bamiyan. There are ten guards protecting the site against vandalism and looting.

The 1981 plan on 'Rehabilitation and revitalisation of the Bamiyan Valley cultural heritage, has been recently reactivated and has the objective to prepare and implement a programme for the protection, conservation and presentation of the Bamiyan Valley, to undertake exploration and excavation of the archaeological remains, and to prepare and implement a programme for sustainable cultural tourism in the valley.

The Governor of the Province is responsible for the implementation of the regional development plan, which includes rehabilitation of housing, provision of health and educational services, and development of infrastructures and agriculture.

The government hopes that the inscription on the World Heritage List will contribute to the preparation of an appropriate property management plan.

Resources:

Some foreign funds have been allocated through UNESCO, e.g. Japanese government for the consolidation of cliff faces and conservation of mural paintings, as well as through ICOMOS for expert missions. There are also projects for the reorganisation of agriculture.

The Afghan government, in collaboration with international organisations, is currently identifying already trained Afghan expertise, who could be involved in the process of safeguarding.

Tourism development will need to be taken up when the situation in the country has been stabilised.

Justification by the State Party (summary)

The State Party has nominated the property under the criteria i, ii, iii, iv and vi.

Criterion i: The cave art in the Bamiyan Valley is a masterpiece of early Buddhist cave art and one of the exceptional testimonies of Gandharan art in this region.

Criterion ii: The monuments and archaeological remains of Bamiyan Valley together represent an important interchange of religious values and diverse cultural traditions.

Criterion iii: The Bamiyan Valley bears an exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition which has disappeared.

Criterion iv: The Bamiyan Valley is an outstanding example of a cultural landscape which illustrates a significant period in Buddhism.

Criterion vi: The Bamiyan Valley is a property which is directly and tangibly associated with a tragic, violent and deliberate destruction of irreplaceable cultural heritage in the 21st century.

The State Party nominates the property as a **cultural landscape** (criterion ii, 'organically evolved landscape'): The Bamiyan Valley is a landscape which has evolved through geological formation and human intervention, and the process of evolution in their form and component features are still visible today. Even today, one can witness

the landscape being continuously used, which retains an active social role in contemporary society of the local communities.

The State Party also asks the property to be put on the **World Heritage in Danger List** considering that it is threatened by serious and specific danger, and because major operations are necessary for its conservation.

3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

Actions by ICOMOS

ICOMOS has made an evaluation of the property in 1982. ICOMOS has organised several international expert missions during the past two years in order to assess the state of conservation of the heritage resources, and to contribute to their safeguarding.

Conservation

Conservation history:

The towns and monasteries in the Bamiyan Valley were destroyed and looted by the Mongols, remaining abandoned for a long period. Parts of the site have been occupied since the 19th century. From the 1970s, the site has suffered from liminary occupation and armed conflicts, and in March 2001, the large Buddha statues were destroyed with dynamite to the order of Mullah Omar.

The first archaeological studies in Bamiyan were carried out, in the 1920s and 1930s, by the French archaeological mission (DAFA). The French and Italian missions continued the explorations in the 1950s and 1960s. An Afghan team, under R. Sengupta from the Archaeological Survey of India, undertook the conservation and restoration of the large Buddha statues. A Japanese team from Kyoto University surveyed the mural paintings in the 1970s. In the past two years, there have been several missions by UNESCO and ICOMOS identifying the state of conservation of the site.

State of conservation:

Many of the caves and architectural remains of the Bamiyan Valley are in precarious condition. The niches of the large Buddhas have been damaged in the explosion of 2001, which caused cracks and also destroyed many of the mural decorations. The material of the rock is fragile and is easily dissolved in water, even though the surface is hardened and more resistant. The traditional buildings in the valley have been constructed in unbaked earth, and many of them have been repaired using traditional methods and materials after the war.

There are currently studies being made to identify appropriate methods for the consolidation of the cliffs, and the conservation of the sculpted and painted remains. There are hypotheses for a partial anastylosis of the

Buddha statues, using the fragments on the site. The largest of these are about 4 cubic meters. Anastylosis, as indicated in article 15 of the Venice Charter, is also considered a reasonable way to protect the remaining fragments of the statues.

Management:

At the moment, the management system is provisional with help from international community, in view of the development of a revised legal framework and appropriate administrative, scientific and technical resources. There is no property management plan yet, but it is foreseen that such a plan be prepared and implemented in the coming years.

Risk analysis:

The heritage properties are in a fragile state of conservation considering that they have suffered from abandonment, military actions, and dynamite explosions. They require urgent cure.

There are some 50,000 inhabitants in the valley at the moment. Parts of the buffer zones are still used for military purposes. There is also some limited mining of rocks in the buffer zone of the Bamiyan Cliff. The area is subject to seismic hazard. Rain and snow can aggravate the fragile condition of the remains.

The major dangers include: risk of imminent collapse of the Buddha niches with the remaining fragments of the statues, further deterioration of still existing mural paintings in the caves, looting and illicit excavation.

Parts of the area are still not accessible due to anti-person mines.

Authenticity and integrity

The heritage resources in Bamiyan Valley have suffered from various disasters, and are in a fragile state. A major loss was the destruction of the large Buddha statues in 2001. Nevertheless, the valley represents important authentic remains as testimonies to the different cultural phases of its history.

Seen as a cultural landscape, Bamiyan Valley, with its artistic and architectural remains, the traditional land use and the simple mud brick constructions has retained an integrity, which may be vulnerable in face of development, and requires careful conservation and management.

Comparative evaluation

There are several Buddhist sites already inscribed on the World Heritage list. These include: Ajanta Caves (1983; i, ii, iii, vi), Ellora Caves (1983; i, iii, vi) in India; Seokguram Grotto and Bulguksa Temple (1995; i, iv) in Korea; Golden Temple of Dambulla (1991; i, vi), Ancient City of Polonnaruwa (1982, i, iii, vi), Sacred City of Anuradhapura

(1982; ii, iii, vi) in Sri Lanka; Mogao Caves (1987; i, ii, iii, iv, v, vi), Dazu Rock Carvings (1999; i, ii, iii), Longmen Grottoes (2000; i, ii, iii), Yungang Grottoes (2001; i, ii, iii, iv) in China.

The Gandhara region being a crossroads of cultural influences received Buddhist missionaries already during the reign of the Indian emperor Asoka (3rd century BCE). In the 1st century AD, under the rulers of the Kushan Empire Gandhara maintained contacts with Rome, but there are influences also from the Hellenistic and Sasanian art. In the interpretation of Buddhist legends, the Gandhara school incorporated many motifs and techniques from classical Roman art. The basic iconography remained Indian, related to Mathura school, but it developed independently. As a result, the Gandhara school achieved its specific artistic expression, differing from similar sites elsewhere. Bamiyan Valley has some of its most important representations. The 55m tall Buddha statue was the tallest in the world.

Outstanding universal value

General statement:

Bamiyan Valley is an exceptional cultural landscape, resulting from the interaction between man and nature especially from 1st to 13th centuries CE. It is an outstanding representation of the Buddhist art as it developed under the Kushan Empire from the 1st century CE, reaching its climax in the 4th to 8th centuries. The standing Buddha statues of 3rd to 6th centuries were particularly representative of this art. The valley contains a large number of monastic ensembles and some 1000 caves; many of them have been richly decorated with paintings and sculptures.

The Gandhara school of Buddhist art, of which Bamiyan Valley is an outstanding representation, drew from the Hellenistic, Roman and Sasanian art traditions. The Buddha was represented with a youthful Apollo-like face, dressed like Roman imperial statues. The school had important influence from India, though it differed from this in its cultural expressions. The general trend was toward an idealized image. The Gandharan craftsmen made an important contribution to Buddhist art in their painted compositions related to Buddha's life.

Islamic religion was introduced in the region in the 13th century, and has contributed to the enrichment of the Valley through the construction of a number of fortified cities.

4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for the future

It is recommended that the State Party make every effort to guarantee the adequate legal framework for the protection and conservation of Bamiyan Valley. It is further

recommended that the International community continue its collaboration with the scope to provide a sustainable basis for the future conservation, rehabilitation and maintenance of the Bamiyan cultural landscape, its monumental remains and traditional settlements.

Recommendation with respect to inscription

That the property be inscribed on the basis of ***criteria i, ii, iii, iv and vi:***

Criterion i: The Buddha statues and the cave art in Bamiyan Valley are an outstanding representation of the Gandharan school in Buddhist art in the Central Asian region.

Criterion ii: The artistic and architectural remains of Bamiyan Valley, and an important Buddhist centre on the Silk Road, are an exceptional testimony to the interchange of Indian, Hellenistic, Roman, Sasanian influences as the basis for the development of a particular artistic expression in the Gandharan school. To this can be added the Islamic influence in a later period.

Criterion iii: The Bamiyan Valley bears an exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition in the Central Asian region, which has disappeared.

Criterion iv: The Bamiyan Valley is an outstanding example of a cultural landscape which illustrates a significant period in Buddhism.

Criterion vi: The Bamiyan Valley is the most monumental expression of the western Buddhism. It was an important centre of pilgrimage over many centuries. Due to their symbolic values, the monuments have suffered at different times of their existence, including the deliberate destruction in 2001, which shook the whole world.

It is further recommended that the property be inscribed on the World Heritage in Danger List considering that it is threatened by the imminent danger of further deterioration, and considering that major operations are necessary for its conservation.

ICOMOS, 16 June 2003