

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ
WORLD HERITAGE LIST N° 244

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Elephanta Caves

Location : State of Maharashtra

State Party : India

Date : October 15, 1982

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the inclusion of the proposed cultural property on the World Heritage List be deferred.

C) JUSTIFICATION

The island of Gharapuri, "the city of caves", situated about 10 kms from Bombay on the east side of the harbor, owes its name to the enormous stone elephant found there by Portuguese navigators. This elephant was cut into pieces, removed to Bombay and somehow put together again. It is today the melancholy guardian of Victoria Garden Zoo in Bombay, the great metropolis of Maharashtra State and India's second city populationwise.

The date of the famous Elephanta Caves is still very much debated and varies from the 6th century to the 8th century according to different specialists. They constitute one of the most striking collections of rock-art in India.

There are two groups of caves. To the east, Stupa Hill (thus named because of a small brick Buddhist monument at the top) contains two caves, one of which is unfinished, and several cisterns. To the west, the larger group consists of five rock-cut Hindu shrines. The main cave is universally famous for its carvings to the glory of Shiva, who is exalted in various forms and actions.

The cave consists of a square plan mandapa whose sides measure about 27 m. The interior is divided up into smaller areas by rows of supports. The whole shape carefully imitates a building; false profiled beams have been carved in the roof of the cave and the supports, which are complex structures, combine, from bottom to top, the shapes of the pillars, columns and capitals found in bonded stone architecture.

At the very entrance to the cave, to the north of an esplanade reached by a steep flight of steps, the pilgrim or visitor to this high place of Shivaism is greeted by two large carved panels

depicting, on the left, Shiva Yogisvara (master of yoga) and, on the right, Shiva Nataraja (king of dance), both treated in a monumental style still close to that of the Gupta period. In a chapel on the right of the entrance stands the cylindrical lingam, symbol of the Supreme Being and principle of all energy. This chapel has four doors, each flanked by colossal figures of dvarapala, those mediator guardians whose task was to admit the faithful and keep out ill-intentioned visitors. On each wall of the mandapa, enormous high-reliefs (maximum height: 5.70 m) present further pictures of Shiva.

Opposite the entrance, on the south wall, is the famous and unforgettable three-headed bust of the Mahadeva, whose three faces are the incarnation of three essential functions; to the east, Aghora or Bhairava, terrifying destroyer; to the west, Vamadeva, creator of joy and beauty, incarnated by a woman's head; in the centre, Tatpurusha, master of positive and negative principles of existence and preserver of their harmony. On either side of this central figure there are two other reliefs depicting, on the left, androgynous Shiva, (Ardhanarisvara) and, on the right, Shiva receiving the waters of the Ganges (Gangadhara). Ten other reliefs, placed in each angle of the main hall and in the aisles to the east and west, depict further episodes from the legend of Shiva, such as the marriage of Shiva to Parvati, Shiva killing the devil Andhaka, etc.

The fifteen large reliefs surrounding the lingam chapel in the main Elephanta Cave not only constitute one of the greatest examples of Indian art but also one of the most important collections for the cult of Shiva. ICOMOS is in favor of the principle of the inclusion of Elephanta on the World Heritage List and points out that, after Ajanta and Ellora (included in 1983), then Mahabalipuram (included in 1984), this remarkable collection of rock-art will satisfactorily complete the series of cultural properties of the Indian sub-continent.

However, ICOMOS feels obliged to advise deferring the inclusion for several reasons, which can be resumed thus:

1) No proposition for the exact boundaries of the nominated property is indicated in the file. Does the inclusion concern the whole island of Elephanta? Or all the caves? Or the western group of caves? Or the main cave? Neither the Committee nor a fortiori ICOMOS can at present answer these questions.

2) The nomination form submitted in 1987 was actually written on 20th April 1982. It contains no mention of any restoration campaign since those of 1938 and 1957, and does not indicate what policy will eventually be adopted with regard to the concrete pillars imitating the original stone structures.

3) Nor does it mention any management plan for this fragile property, which is threatened in the medium or long term, by the industrial development of Bombay (oil port on Butcher Island and petrochemical installations, nuclear plant at Trombay and the Indian Commission for Atomic Energy Research Centre, etc.)

ICOMOS, May 1987

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Location : State of Maharashtra

State Party : India

Date : October 15, 1982

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on condition that the Indian authorities provide the exact boundaries of the site.

C) JUSTIFICATION

The island of Gharapuri, "the city of caves", situated about 10 kms from Bombay on the east side of the harbor, owes its name to the enormous stone elephant found there by Portuguese navigators. This elephant was cut into pieces, removed to Bombay and somehow put together again. It is today the melancholy guardian of Victoria Garden Zoo in Bombay, the great metropolis of Maharashtra State and India's second city populationwise.

The date of the famous Elephanta Caves is still very much debated and varies from the 6th century to the 8th century according to different specialists. They constitute one of the most striking collections of rock art in India.

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At the very entrance to the cave, to the north of an esplanade reached by a steep flight of steps, the pilgrim or visitor to

this high place of Shivaism is greeted by two large carved panels depicting, on the left, Shiva Yogisvara (master of yoga) and, on the right, Shiva Nataraja (king of dance), both treated in a monumental style still close to that of the Gupta period. In a chapel on the right of the entrance stands the cylindrical lingam, symbol of the Supreme Being and principle of all energy. This chapel has four doors, each flanked by colossal figures of dvarapala, those mediator guardians whose task was to admit the faithful and keep out ill-intentioned visitors. On each wall of the mandapa, enormous high-reliefs (maximum height: 5.70 m) present further pictures of Shiva.

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