

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° 393

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Archaeological site of Delphi

Location : Province of Parnassus

State Party : Greece

Date : March 6, 1986

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria I, II, III, IV and VI.

C) JUSTIFICATION

Delphi is one of the foremost sites the drafters of the World Heritage Convention must have been thinking of when on 16 November 1972 at the UNESCO General Conference, they draw up the "list of cultural properties of exceptional value whose handing down to future generations is a duty for all humanity," not merely for those countries who possess the heritage.

The Pan-Hellenic sanctuary of Delphi had a phenomenal influence in the Ancient world, as evidenced by the monuments built there by the Athenians, the Etolians, the Corinthians, the Thebans, the Beotians, the Spartans, and the Thessalians, as well as by the inhabitants of Siphnos, Naxos, Rhodes, Cnidus, Marseilles, Syracuse and Tarentum. There is scarcely any other place where the Greek diaspora in the Mediterranean Basin is more perceptible, and few where Hellenic fundamental unity is so manifest. Not far from Omphalos, the "centre of the world", where the Temple of Pythian Apollo is found, there were community and federal areas, including the theater and the stadium, where either every four or eight years, thousands of spectators from the four corners of the globe filled the stands to celebrate the Pythian Games.

The ruins attract more visitors today than the Delphic Oracle attracted those who came to consult it in early times. Congresses and symposiums held at the European Cultural Centre, which was established by the Council of Europe, reaffirms that one of the enduring missions of Delphi is to bring together men and women who otherwise remain divided by material interests.

If the renown of Delphi outshines every other grand Hellenic sanctuary, there is a good reason.

Neither the architectural purity of the monuments (the treasure of the exquisitely perfected structures that the Athenians built from 490 to 485 to commemorate the victory of Marathon, the admirable Tholos of Marmaria); nor the beauty of sculptures which are known throughout the world (Aurige, Thyiades, Antinoüs, etc.); nor the bewitching charm of Homeric legends which transposed into the slaying of the serpent Python by Apollo the disappearance of the old Chthonian cult of Ge-Protomantis at the end of the 9th century B.C., can fully explain the unique quality of Delphi.

This unique quality springs from an intimate harmony shared by the sanctuary in ruins and an unblemished landscape. One has to have seen the first rays of the sun peer over the Temenos of Apollo in the opaque shadow of the Phaedriades, those rocky cliffs from which Mt. Parnassus overlooks Delphi, to understand the supreme extent to which ancient cults translate the innermost realities of the site. One has to have cast a gaze from the gray sea of olive trees in the Valley of Pleistos below, to the glittering sea of the Gulf of Itea, to comprehend that the vocation of Delphi was to bring land dwellers and island-dwellers together for celebrations.

The sanctuary at Delphi cannot be disassociated from its natural surroundings, the principal features of which gave rise to the organization of cults (the Corycian Den and the Castalia Fountain, not to mention the Chiasma). It thus cannot be considered a series of monuments in ruin, nor an archaeological site in the habitual sense of the term. The landscape, which gives the human settlements which arose there their full meaning, clearly must be included in the protected zone. Otherwise one of the most significant sites in the world will lose its full meaning.

The Greek government has felt the need for comprehensive protection and has courageously dealt with the consequences by rejecting the project to construct an aluminium processing plant at Aghia Euthimia, 11.5 km from Delphi. The site of the production plant has been transferred 55 km away, to Dombrena on the northern slope of Mt. Parnassus.

ICOMOS has with relief taken note of this decision, which was announced at the meeting of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee on 23 June 1987, and points out that Delphi meets five criteria for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

- Criterion I. The layout of Delphi, like that of Machu Picchu (which was included on the World Heritage List in 1983) is a unique artistic achievement. Mt. Parnassus is a veritable masterpiece and is where a series of monuments were built whose modular elements -terraces, temples, treasuries, etc.- combine to form a strong expression of the physical and moral values of a site which may be described as magical.

- Criterion II. Delphi had an immense impact throughout the ancient world. In the 6th century B.C., the kings of Lydia sent

valuable gifts to the Sanctuary; when the Temple of Apollo was destroyed by fire in 548 B.C. foreign benefactors, including Amasis, contributed financially to its reconstruction. Major conflicts during the 5th century B.C. were echoed at Delphi: the tripod of Gelon of Syracuse commemorated the victory of the Greeks over the Carthaginians in 481; the Athenian gate bore testimony to the defeat of Xerxes's fleet in 478; the palm tree of Eurymedon hailed the victory over the Persians in 468; and the votive offering of the Navarchs, that of the Spartans over the Athenians in 404.

But during the Hellenistic period, Delphi had an international aura. The Stoa of Attale, the monument to Prusias of Bithynia, and the statue of Eumene II, king of Pergamum, bear testimony to the interest monarchs of the 2nd century A.D. showed in Pythian Apollo. Later, in 125, the emperor Hadrian had a statue in his honor built at Delphi.

The Sanctuary at Delphi, the object of great generosity and the crossroads of a wide variety of influences, was in turn imitated throughout the ancient world. Its influence extended as far as Bactria, following the conquest of Asia by Alexander the Great. Even pillaging of the Sanctuary by the emperor Nero and by Constantine the Great, who transported spoils from it to Rome and Constantinople, added to the artistic influence of Delphi.

- Criterion III. Delphi bears a unique testimony to the religion and civilization of ancient Greece. At the legendary site where Apollo slew the serpent Python, oranian cults replaced chthonian cults and introduced the old heritage of myths originating from primitive times. The Delphic oracle, over which four sacred wars were fought, is one of the focal points of Greek political history. The Theatre and the Stadium, the site every four years of the Pythian games, are meccas of community celebrations reflecting triumphant Hellenism.

- Criterion IV. Delphi, situated in a magnificent natural setting which is still intact, is an outstanding example of a great Panhellenic sanctuary.

- Criterion VI. According to the ancients, the Temple of Apollo was where the Omphalos was located, that is, the navel of the universe, the centre of the earth. Delphi is consequently directly and tangibly associated with a belief of manifest universal significance.

ICOMOS, October 1987