

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° 511

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination: Mystras.

Location: Department of Peloponnesus

State Party: Greece

Date: December 20, 1988

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That inclusion of the proposed cultural property be deferred until specific information is provided on boundaries, measures to protect the surrounding landscape and, especially, on the conservation policy for the ruins of Mystras.

C) JUSTIFICATION

As at Qal'a of Beni Hammad (Algeria) and Kilwa Kisiwani (Tanzania), included on the World Heritage List in 1980 and 1981 respectively, the breathtaking complex of the ruins of Mystras offers the image of a city with a brilliant destiny which was deserted by men and threatened by the return of encroaching vegetation that is splitting the walls and covering the slopes, thus destroying here and there fragile traces of history.

Mystras came into existence in 1248-1249 when the Frankish lord, William II of Villehardouin, Prince of Achaia, resolved to build a great castle atop the 620 m hill overlooking Sparta. The castle would be able to withstand attacks by the Byzantines, and also contain the "Esclavons", the Slavic tribes of the Melinges and the Lezerites who inhabited the Taygete.

Though a few inhabitants continued to live in the ruins, the city was not abandoned until after 1832, when King Othon I founded the new city of Sparta. For nearly six centuries, Mystras lived a troubled existence. However, several times and under different regimes it assumed a leading political and cultural role.

The vicissitudes of history did not spare the construction built by William II of Villehardouin. The castle had barely been completed when the Prince of Achaia, defeated by Michael VIII Paleologus at the battle of Pelagonia and made prisoner, was forced to cede as ransom to basileus, the three strongholds of Monemvasia, Maina and Mystras (1261-1262). When the favor of

victory momentarily shined upon him once again, in 1265, Villehardouin found that the inhabitants of Sparta had deserted that vulnerable city and taken refuge around the castle of Mystras.

From 1262 to 1348, because of many wars in which it was often the prize, Mystras was the seat of the Byzantine military governor, first named for a year then, after 1308, for life. The bishopric of Sparta was transferred to the new city, and the Metropolis, dedicated to St. Demetrios, was built in 1264, and reconstructed after 1310. Convents, such as those of the Theodore Saints (prior to 196) and those of Brontochion (c. 1310) were built and richly decorated.

From 1348 to 1460 Mystras became the capital of the despotate of Morea. The despotate was the expression of the relative desire to decentralization of the Cantacuzenes (1348-1384) and the Paleologi (1384-1460), who, according to a system modeled after feudalism, conferred power to family, in most cases to sons or brothers. During this period - the zenith of Mystras, when the Peribleptos and the Pantanassa were built c. 1350 and in 1428 respectively - the cosmopolitan city was a major piece on the political chessboard on the Mediterranean. Most of the despots married Frankish princesses; some made necessary alliances with the Turks, others with the Venitians. In 1402 Theodore I Paleologus sold Mystras to the Knights of Rhodes; only the hostile reaction of the population forced him to cancel the transaction.

After paying a tribute to Murad II at the time of his victorious expedition in 1446, Mystras fell to Mohammed II on 30 May 1460. The event was seen in the West and in the East as being of nearly equal importance as the fall of Constantinople in 1453; The beauty of the churches of Mystras, which during the "Paleologus Renaissance" had been covered with dramatic frescoes, the renown of Mystras libraries, and the glory of its writers -including Georges Gemiste Plethon and Jean Bessarion who brought neo-platonic humanism to Italy - gave substance thereafter for the legend of the "Wondor of Morea".

Dominated by the Turks, conquered briefly by the Venitians in 1669, then occupied for a longer period from 1687 to 1715 and recaptured in 1715 by the Ottoman Empire, Mystras never recovered its past grandeur, though it still numbered some 40,000 inhabitants. The silk industry was the manufacturing and trading city's only resource. Mystras was burned by the Albanians during the Magna Revolt in 1770 and was in a state of decadence when it was definitively abandoned.

ICOMOS can only express a favorable opinion in principle to the inclusion of Mystras on the World Heritage List. There is no lack of criteria justifying nomination of this medieval city whose complex history is so clearly inscribed in the series of

fortifications, castles and palaces, churches and convents, houses streets, and public squares. However, given the states of the nomination file, the recommendation of ICOMOS is that inclusion be deferred until detailed information is provided on protection of the environment and on the restoration policy.

- The surrounding landscape of great beauty, from the Eurotas Plain to the summits of the Taygete rising to the south at 2,404 m, should be granted additional measures of protection, outside the archeological protection perimeter. No information has been furnished on the ministerial decision scheduled for 28/04/88 which appears to consider such a protection.

- The ruins of Mystras, which extend in steps among rocks on the wooded slopes of a hill, should have carefully planned measures of maintenance if the archeological site is to preserve its clarity, homogeneity and charm.

ICOMOS commends the work of the 5th Ephory of Byzantine Antiquities, which was accomplished in often difficult conditions, but it is concerned about the projects prepared by the "Committee to Restore the Monuments of Mystras". Of the projects, the one to rebuild the Byzantine palace, which was presented for the first time at the International Symposium on Mystras in 1985, commented at the Byzantines Studies Conference in Washington in 1986, and discussed in detail in recent studies (the last being in the journal Architectura, XVII, 1987, p. 108-128), appears to take the policy on conservation of the site onto new ground. As in the case of the reconstruction of the Stoa of Attalus in Athens, reconstruction of the palace of Mystras would modify the intrinsic equilibrium between the landscape, the existing monuments and the ruins.

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ICOMOS Recommendation for the nomination of Mystras to the World Heritage List following the examination of complementary information provided by Greece

The Bureau of ICOMOS met on 8 November 1989 and, in accordance with the request of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee and the wishes expressed by the Secretariat in its letter dated 16 October, examined the documents relative to the site of Mystras forwarded on 28 June, 29 June and 3 October 1989 by the Permanent Delegate of Greece at UNESCO.

The Bureau devoted special attention to the excerpt of the report on Act n° 12/4.4.1989 of the Central Archaeological Council of Greece concerning the restoration work on the Palace of Mystras.

It noted that the plan appended to the document had been borrowed from a work by Stefan Sinos ("Organisation und Form des byzantinischen Palastes von Mystras", Architectura, XVII, 1987, fig.3, p. 109) and that the description code of the Palace was the same as in the study referred to on pp. 105-128. Furthermore, it noted that the Central Archaeological Council had approved the main reconstruction proposals presented by Mr. Sinos, including :

1) Building E

- the Throne Room : complete walls and reconstitute openings. Construction of a two-sided roof covered with tiles reconstituting the original model.

2) The Delta building

- Ground floor : reconstitution of a lime mortar floor.
- First floor : complete walls and coatings, restore openings. Construction of a four-sided roof with ceiling.

3) Building B

- Ground floor : reconstruction of the south and east walls of Building B1. Reconstitute lime mortar floor. Restore vaults. Reconstitute stone stairway. Complete coatings.
- First floor : complete walls of Building B, reconstruct and complete walls in Building B1 including openings. To let in light and for the appearance of the facade, construct a window in the east wall as shown in drawings. Reconstitute lime plaster floor. Complete coatings. Reconstruct the vaults under the flat roof. Reconstruct a two-sided roof in Building B1.

4) The Gamma building

- Ground floor : reconstitute the east wall and the transversal wall inside. Rebuild the landing and the stairs leading to the mezzanine. Reconstitute the floor in stone flagging up to the transversal wall and the rest in lime mortar. Rebuild the vaults on the mezzanine. Reconstitute coatings of the walls.
- Mezzanine : reconstruct the lime mortar floor and build a wood stairway leading to the first floor.
- First floor : rebuild and complete walls and coatings. Build a two-sided roof. Restore the original shape of the south window.

According to the Bureau of ICOMOS, such extensive, irreversible restoration of the Byzantine Palace at Mystras would seriously modify the aesthetic and historic features of a site whose authenticity is specifically linked to its state as a ruin.

At the meeting, the fate of numerous comparable archaeological sites already included on the World Heritage List was mentioned. The Bureau was concerned about the risk posed to the authenticity of these sites by the adoption of partial or total reconstitution projects of major monuments. It referred in particular to the following cases; Al Qal'a of Beni Hammad (Algeria, included in 1980); the Jesuit Missions of the Guaranis (Argentina and Brazil, 1984 and 1983), Anjar (Lebanon, 1984), Chan Chan (Peru, 1986), Sigiriya (Sri Lanka, 1982), Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara (Tanzania, 1981), Kerkuane (Tunisia, 1985), Nemrut Dag (Turkey, 1987), Studley Royal Park and the Abbey of Fountains (United Kingdom, 1986), the Cahokia Mounds (United States, 1982) and the Great Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe, 1986). In each instance such restoration work would destroy forever the overall balance of the site.

The Bureau of ICOMOS therefore unanimously concluded that the inclusion of Mystras on the World Heritage List could not be recommended in view of the project approved by the Central Archaeological Council at its meeting on 4 April 1989.

ICOMOS, November 15, 1989.

Plan archéologique

Ruelles pavées - sentiers —
Murailles ———
Monuments importants ———
352 m etc = altitude

