

Butrint (Albania)

No 570bis

Identification

Nomination Butrint (extension)

Location Region of Saranda

State Party Albania

Date 2 July 1999

Justification by State Party

Butrint represents a microcosm of Mediterranean history, with the earliest evidence for occupation dating to the Middle Palaeolithic (50,000 BP) and the latest to the final period of the Venetian Republic (18th century). The monuments in the proposed 200ha site offer a rare and important archaeological resource in terms of:

- *Archaeological-historical significance* – the good state of preservation of a rich and varied archaeological record, representing over 3000 years of occupation history for both the settlement of Butrint and the settlements within its sphere of influence.
- *Geological-historical significance* – the combination of a changing landscape formation (ie patterns of erosion and silting, resulting in a shifting coastline) and the resultant changes in settlement pattern (fossilized in the archaeological record) offers a unique “landscape museum” of the effects of nature on man and *vice versa*.
- *Group value* – the rare preservation of a main settlement together with its satellite sites provides an important record of the interaction between town and countryside.
- *Integrity of the cultural landscape* – the integrity of the main site, the satellite sites, and the landscape setting has been well preserved owing to the lack of 20th century development and interference. The only significant landscape development of the 20th century has been a land-reclamation programme which led to the drainage of the marshland around Butrint.
- *Aesthetic appeal* – a strong spirit of place and a landscape of outstanding natural beauty created by the unique combination of archaeology and nature, not found on other Mediterranean sites.
- *Cultural resource potential* – the unspoilt nature of Butrint and its landscape and the good state of conservation of the archaeological record, together with a comprehensive archaeological archive, provide an excellent opportunity to

develop Butrint carefully as a cultural resource which can be used for education, recreation, and interpretive purposes.

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 *site*. It is also a *cultural landscape* as defined in paragraph 39 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (1999).

History and Description

History

During the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic (50,000-10,000 BP) the site at Shën Dimitri/Xarra was occupied. It was originally on the coast but retreat of the coastline has meant that it is now 2km inland.

There are several Bronze Age (2000-500BC) sites in the nominated area, including those at Kalivo, the acropolis of Butrint, and Shën Dimitri. From 800BC until the arrival of the Romans in 44BC, when it was under Greek domination, the area was settled by the Chaonian tribe, who occupied the Butrint and Kalivo sites. Butrint took on the appearance of a Greek *polis*, with public buildings such as a theatre and temples. It then became a Roman colony in the province of Illyria and expanded considerably, on reclaimed marshland. It was equipped with the usual appurtenances of a Roman city, including an aqueduct bringing water and roads, along which smaller settlements developed.

In the later Roman period a section of Butrint was fortified (as were several of the inland settlements) and substantial palaeochristian structures, such as basilicas and a baptistery, were built. There was a short period of abandonment during the period of Slav invasions in the 7th century. When Byzantine control was re-established Butrint was largely reconstructed.

The region came under Angevin and then Venetian control in the 14th century, and it was governed by a *castellan* based on nearby Corfu. Repeated attacks by the Despots of Epirus and then the Ottoman Turks led to the strengthening and extension of the defensive works of Butrint, including the castle, the triangular fortress, and new city walls.

Turkish dominion was established at the end of the 15th century, after the resistance of the national hero, Skanderbeg, was finally overcome. Albania achieved independence in 1912 after the second Balkan War

Description

The area nominated as an extension to the existing inscribed site (which is confined to the major archaeological monuments) consists of a range of hills to the north, the Butrint plain, Lake Bufit, and part of Lake Butrint.

The major monuments in this area of 200ha are:

- Kalivo: Bronze Age and later site with a large polygonal defensive wall with towers;
- Diaporit: Remains of a Roman villa, bath-house, and Byzantine basilica;

- A section of the main Roman road between Valona and Nikopolis, together with the link road to Butrint;
- The main walled area of Butrint, containing monuments from the 4th to 16th centuries (part already on the World Heritage List);
- The suburbs of Roman Butrint from the Republican period to the Late Empire;
- The ruins of the Roman aqueduct;
- The Roman building and later church at Shën Deli;
- The Palaeolithic find site on Shën Dimitri/Xarra;
- The triangular fortress (Angevin and Venetian period) and a Venetian defensive tower;
- The 18th century castle of Ali Pasha./

Management and Protection

Legal status

The entire nominated area is statutorily protected. In 1948 93 monuments were protected under the provisions of the Law No 586/1948 on the Protection of Cultural Monuments and Rare Natural Sites: this covers all the individual monuments in the area. In 1981 a special government decree nominated the 25ha of woodland at Butrint as a site of special natural interest under the same legislation. There are severe penalties for any action that has an adverse impact on protected cultural and natural monuments.

Management

The entire area is owned by the Albanian State. Its boundaries come within the villages of Ksamli to the north and Vrina to the south, where services and access to the sites will be concentrated.

The site is managed by a site director appointed by and responsible to the Ministry of Culture. There is a site management committee (the Saranda Office) composed of representatives of the Saranda Municipal Council, the Institute of Monuments, the Institute of Archaeology, the Natural History Museum, and the Ministry of Tourism.

The existing World Heritage site is enclosed by a fence and overseen by a resident police force of twelve men. This is to be expanded into a ranger force in the event of the present extension being approved.

At the present time there is no approved management plan. However, one is under preparation by a group comprising representatives of the Ministry of Culture, the Institute of Monuments, the Institute of Archaeology, the Natural History Museum, and the UK-based Butrint Foundation; it will be completed early in 2000. The plan includes the following elements:

Stage 1 Background reports

- Management reports;
- Environmental reports;
- Park development reports.

Stage 2 Policy making

- The role of Butrint in the development of tourism;

- Management of the archaeological resource and future research programme;
- Management of the natural resource and future enhancement programme;
- Day-to-day management (staff, funding, training).

Stage 3 Presentation and publication

Presentation of the plan to regional, national, and international interest groups and stakeholders.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Restoration of some of the sites were carried out between 1926 and 1944 by the Italian Archaeological Mission. This work was continued by the Albanian Institute of Monuments. Detailed records were kept of all interventions and a number of scientific reports were published. The Archaeological Park of Butrint was opened to visitors in the 1960s.

Currently the recently formed Institute of Archaeology is working with foreign teams. Research in the form of survey was extended between 1994 and 1998 to monuments in the hinterland of Butrint, as a result of which there has been a reassessment of the significance of its archaeology.

Following the civil unrest in 1997, a joint UNESCO-ICOMOS mission visited the site. Following the presentation of its report, the site was put on the List of World Heritage in Danger at the 21st Session of the World Heritage Committee.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the archaeological sites included in the present proposal for extension is high, principally because of the lack of 20th century development in the area. The quality of the restoration and conservation work carried out from 1924 onwards is high, and fully in accordance with contemporary standards, as set out in the 1964 Venice Charter.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

In view of the shortage of time between notification of this proposal and the date of the 1999 meeting of the World Heritage Committee, ICOMOS was not able to send a mission. However, the proposal for extension originates in the report of the 1997 UNESCO-ICOMOS mission, and comments on the proposal were invited from its expert on that mission, who also participated in the workshop held at Saranda on 15-17 April 1998 to design the management plan for Butrint.

Qualities

Butrint and its hinterland constitute an exceptional cultural landscape, which has developed organically over many centuries and has escaped aggressive development of the type that has reduced the heritage value of most historic landscapes in the Mediterranean region. It constitutes a very rare combination of archaeology and nature.

Comparative analysis

Because its historic character has not been compromised in the post-war period, Butrint is without serious competition as a multi-period Mediterranean heritage site which retains its natural setting virtually intact. There are other sites with equally long histories in Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, and elsewhere, but none offers the same authenticity and completeness.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

The main concern of ICOMOS relates to the general development of the area outside the designated park. Large-scale development is proposed, some of it within a short distance of the main concentration of archaeological monuments. One in particular, on the end of the promontory to the west of the site, is especially undesirable and should not be allowed proceed.

Brief description

Butrint is an exceptional Mediterranean multi-period site, with evidence of human settlement from the Palaeolithic period to the 18th century well preserved in an untouched natural setting of considerable beauty.

Recommendation

That this extension should be *approved*, on condition that the State Party withdraws permission for development of the area to the west of the main archaeological remains and includes it within the inscribed site.