

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Sokkuram Grotto
<i>Location</i>	North Kyongsang Province
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Korea
<i>Date</i>	21 October 1994

Justification by State Party

Sokkuram Buddhist Grotto is a cultural heritage of outstanding aesthetic and artistic achievement. The basic layout consists of a rectangular antechamber, a main rotunda, and a corridor connecting the two. This is an unprecedented construction technique by which a domed ceiling for the main rotunda and an entrance corridor were created with more than 360 stone slabs.

The main Buddha enshrined in the rotunda sits in a cross-legged position, his eyes closed in meditation. The Buddha's features are exquisitely portrayed - gentle eyebrows, noble nose, long ears, and tightly curled hair all testifying to the profundity of the Buddha's mind. The Sokkuram Buddha embodies an ideal beauty and is recognized as one of the finest examples of Buddhist sculpture in eastern Asia. The stone lotus pedestal supporting the main Buddha is of white granite, its ingenious design and beautiful sculpturing techniques enhancing the majestic dignity of the Buddha.

Criterion i

Sokkuram Grotto is a distinctive cultural heritage testifying to the development of important cultural assets, society, art, science, and industry. It consists of carved white granite slabs placed side by side around the walls of the rectangular antechamber and the inner rotunda where the Buddha is enshrined. The main Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Ten Disciples, Eight Divine Guardians, two Devas, and two Vajrapanis inside the grotto are carved from white granite, giving the impression of having realized the Pure Land of Buddha (*Sukkavati*) in the present world.

The grotto is considered to be a masterpiece of exquisite beauty and great historical significance and a symbol of the Shilla Kingdom, an era of dramatic development in religion, doctrine, science, and the formative arts. In its layout it achieves an organic blend of architecture, mathematics, geometry, physics, astronomy, religion, and art, unifying all these elements in a single entity.

Criterion iv

Sokkuram Grotto is an invaluable cultural heritage because of its outstanding historical significance and associations with ideology, religion, historical events, and the experiences of individuals, such as its creator, Kim Tae-song.

Mount T'oham, the first to greet the sunrise in the capital of Shilla, was one of Shilla's five major mountains, even before Buddhism was introduced, and was revered as the spiritual mountain of the Shilla people. Legend has it that King Munmu, thirtieth ruler (from 661-81) and hero in the unification of the Three Kingdoms under Shilla, met Sokt'alhae, a former Shilla king said to have been born in the East Sea Dragon Palace, in a dream and moved his remains to Mount T'oham in the late 7th century. He named Sokt'alhae "the Great King of the Eastern Mountain" and worshipped him as a powerful mountain spirit. The main rotunda of the grotto enshrines a seated Buddha as the principal figure, together with images of Bodhisattvas and divine guardians. The various scenes of the Pure Land of the Buddha join to create a paradise at the heart of Mount T'oham, making it all the more majestic and mysterious.

The main Buddha faces in the direction of the undersea tomb of King Munmu, off the eastern coast of Korea, and Kamunsa Temple. King Munmu ordered the tomb built to ward off foreign invaders. Kamunsa Temple was completed by his son Shinmun (reigned 681-92).

Criterion vi

Category of property

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the Sokkuram nomination constitutes a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

Construction of Sokkuram Grotto began in AD 751, the tenth year of the reign of Shilla King Kyongdyok, by Kim the Prime Minister, Tae-song and completed in 774, the tenth year of the reign of King Hyeogong. It is recorded that it was originally known as Sokbulsu Temple. There are no subsequent documentary references until the mid Choson period, when it is recorded that it was restored in 1703 and again in 1758.

Description

Sokkuram Grotto is located on the south-eastern slope of Mount T'oham, facing the East Sea. It is built in granite and features 39 Buddhist engravings on the main wall and the principal sculpture of the Buddha in the centre.

The grotto consists of a 14.8 m high antechamber, a corridor, and a main rotunda. The Eight Guardian Deities are carved in relief on the walls of the rectangular antechamber, four on either side. Two figures of Vajradhara stand on either side of the entrance to the corridor leading from the antechamber to the main rotunda. The Four Guardian Kings are carved in pairs on either side of the narrowed part of the corridor.

There are two octagonal stone pillars, one on either side of the entrance to the main rotunda, where the main Buddha stands slightly off-centre. The walls to the left and right of the entrance are covered with relief images of two Devas, two Bodhisattvas, and the Ten Disciples. In the middle of the wall behind the main Buddha there is an exquisite wall carving of an eleven-faced Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. The stones beneath each carved figure on the walls of the antechamber and the main rotunda are also carved. At the time of construction there was a marble stupa in front of the Avalokitesvara, but it was removed during the Japanese colonial period.

A large circular lotus flower is set in the wall above the Avalokitesvara behind the main Buddha, creating the illusion of a halo for the Buddha when seen from the front. There are ten niches lining the upper wall on either side of this lotus flower: originally each contained images of Bodhisattvas or Buddhist devotees, but two are now missing. The vaulted ceiling is made of dressed stones which meet in another carved lotus flower at the top of the main hall.

The main Sakyamuni Buddha figure is 3.45 m high, and set on a lotus flower-shaped pedestal. The hair is tightly curled and there is a distinct *ushnisa*, the protuberance on the top of the head symbolizing supreme wisdom. Beneath the broad forehead the eyebrows are shaped like crescent moons and the half-closed eyes gaze towards the East Sea. The Buddha's robe is slung over the right shoulder; the details of the robe covering the left arm and chest are realistically depicted. The Buddha is portrayed cross-legged with the hands in the *bhumisparsha mudra* position, the gesture with which the historical Buddha summoned the earth as witness to his realization of enlightenment. All the other figures - Vajradharas, Guardian Kings, Devas, Bodhisattvas, Disciples, and Guardian Deities - are between 1.69 m and 2.18 m tall, and are elaborately carved with great attention to naturalistic detailing.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The Grotto belongs to the Korean Buddhist Chogye Order and there are no plans for taking it into public ownership. The Grotto and its surroundings are protected by a number of statutory instruments.

In December 1962 it was designated National Treasure No 24 under the provisions of the Cultural Property Preservation Law. The area of 129.4 ha surrounding the grotto is designated and managed as a Cultural Property

Preservation Zone in accordance with Article 8 of the Law. Any alteration to the current status requires authorization, in accordance with Article 20 of the same Law. It is a Cultural Property Preservation Zone as defined in Article 18 of the Urban Planning Law.

The site is designated as a traditional Buddhist temple with historical significance in accordance with Article 3 of the Traditional Buddhist Temple Preservation Law. It is designated and managed as a Natural Environment Preservation Zone under Article 13 of the Natural Environment Preservation Law, Article 23 of which imposes environmental restrictions within the zone to protect specific wildlife and plants.

Under Article 14 of the Natural Park Law it is also designated as a Natural Environment Preservation Zone, and Article 13 places restrictions on the construction of buildings or other facilities within the designated area. It is an Environmental Effect Evaluation Zone under Article 5 of the Environmental Effect Evaluation Law; Article 2 of the enforcement regulations for this Law requires permission to be sought from the Ministry of Culture and Sports in respect of any proposed development within the designated zone. Similar conditions apply with respect to its designation as a Natural Environment Preservation Zone under the Law of National Land Use Management (Article 13).

Management

The site is managed as part of the Kyongju National Park. The supervising national agency is the Office of Cultural Properties of the Ministry of Culture and Sports. Other collaborating institutions are the Ministry of Construction (Taegu Regional Construction and Management Office), the Ministry of Home Affairs (Korea National Parks Authority), and the Ministry of Environment (Taegu Regional Office).

Kyongju, capital of the Shilla Kingdom, has the richest collection of cultural relics in Korea and is a very popular tourist attraction. In 1993 it received 1.46 million visitors, with students representing over half the total. Sokkuram is a popular destination for school excursions in particular.

Government funding is available for the management, preservation, restoration, and recording of the Grotto. Currently the holdings accrued from entrance fees is over 758 million won, which is invested in accordance with Article 33 of the Cultural Property Preservation Law. This fund may only be used for repairs, environmental cleaning of the surroundings, fire-prevention measures, and presenting the property to the public.

Current management projects include a comprehensive investigation of the installation and effectiveness of temperature and humidity control devices and planning for permanent measures and the implementation of a comprehensive academic study aimed at the restoration of the grotto to its original state.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The following conservation measures have been taken in the present century:

- 1913-14: Following the partial collapse of the ceiling, the entire grotto was dismantled and covered with a concrete dome (this resulted in severe distortion of the original structure and a general deterioration in the overall state of preservation).
- 1917: Application of a layer of lime mortar, clay, and earth on the surface of the concrete dome to prevent water in-leakage.
- 1920-23: Repairs to prevent mould and leakage damage.
- 1961-64: Construction of a second concrete dome over the former one, with a space of 1.2 m between them, to prevent climatic damage and mould formation and to adjust the air-flow. A wooden antechamber was added and the grotto was sealed.
- 1966: Installation of a dehumidifier and an entrance door to the antechamber.

- 1970: Cleaning of the interior to prevent discoloration of the stone.
- 1971: Landscaping of the surrounding area.
- 1977: Renovation of the antechamber.
- 1979: Installation of a powered fire pump and fire/smoke detector system.
- 1981: Emergency restoration of hurricane damage, and restoration of 10.53 m stone axis, installation of 9 m steel wall, 5.17 m drainage pipe, and one holding tank.
- 1982: Painting of the antechamber and installation of electric facilities.
- 1983: Repair of lighting facilities.

The conservation problems at Sokkuram relate to the growth of moulds and moss and weather damage to the stone figures. Current maintenance measures, such as barriers to the inflow of external air and the installation of circulation devices, adequately maintain an even temperature and control humidity. However, restoration of the grotto's original structure and modification of improper repairs carried out during the Japanese colonial period (eg removal of the cement covering the outside of the grotto) need further study.

Authenticity

A number of rather drastic measures were taken in the earlier part of the present century which have to some extent reduced the authenticity of the Grotto in terms of form and to a lesser extent of materials (although they were acceptable in their time and in the face of serious deterioration). The authenticity of function and site are completely intact.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

ICOMOS obtained an expert evaluation of the cultural significance of the site from Dr Gina L Barnes (St John's College, Cambridge, UK). An expert mission visited the site in February 1995.

Qualities and comparative analysis

The Grotto is a masterpiece of Korean Buddhist art, without equal in the region.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

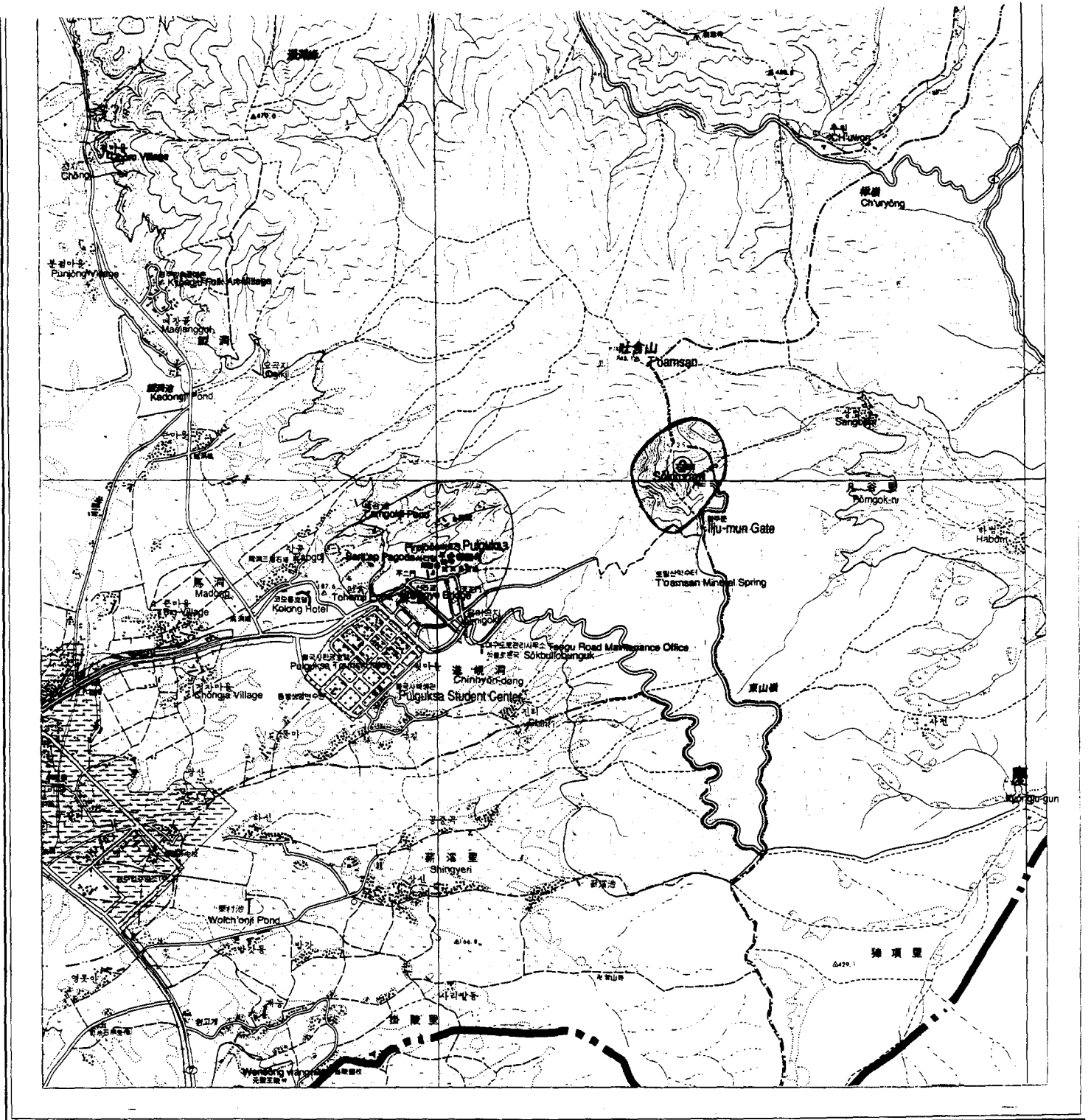
The Pulguksa Temple, built in AD 752, lies within the protection zone of the Sokkuram Grotto and is closely linked with it culturally. It is a living monument with great historical, architectural, and artistic value. On the recommendation of ICOMOS the State Party agreed to extend the nomination to include this integral component.

Recommendation

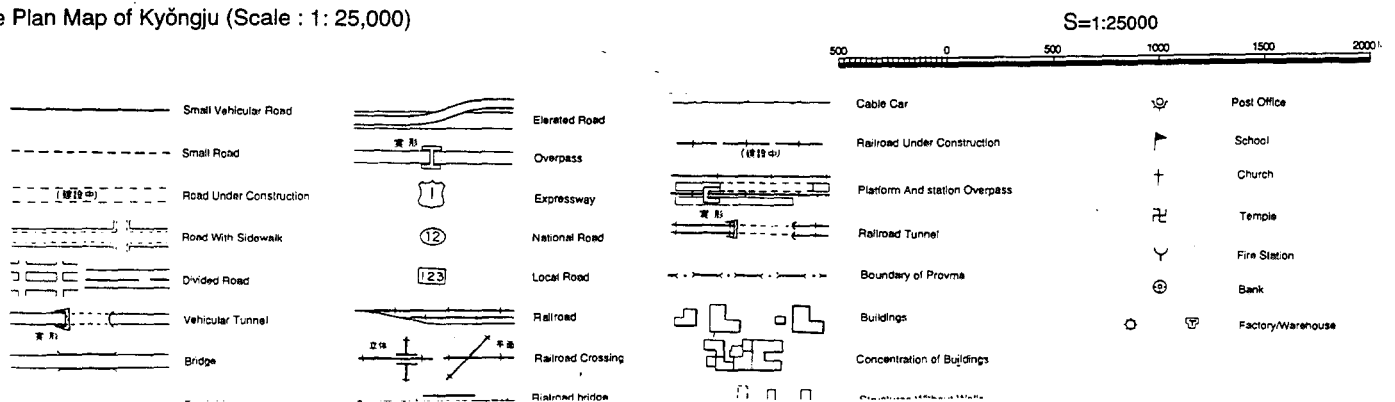
That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i and iv*:

The Sokkuram Grotto is a masterpiece of Far Eastern Buddhist art, and the complex that it forms with the Pulguksa Temple is an outstanding example of the religious architecture of the region and of the material expression of Buddhist belief.

ICOMOS, September 1995

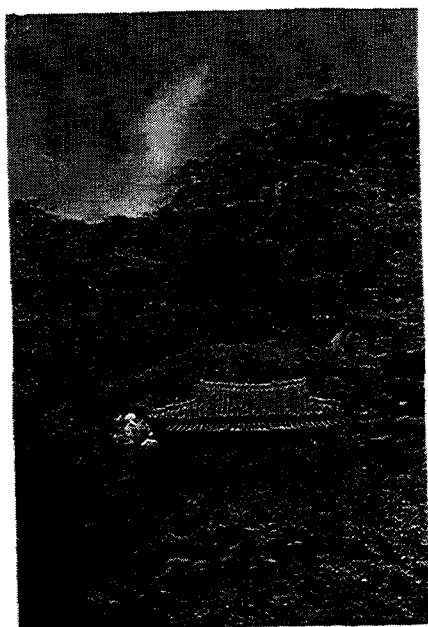


• Service Plan Map of Kyongju (Scale : 1 : 25,000)



Sokkuram : plan de localisation du site et de la zone de protection /

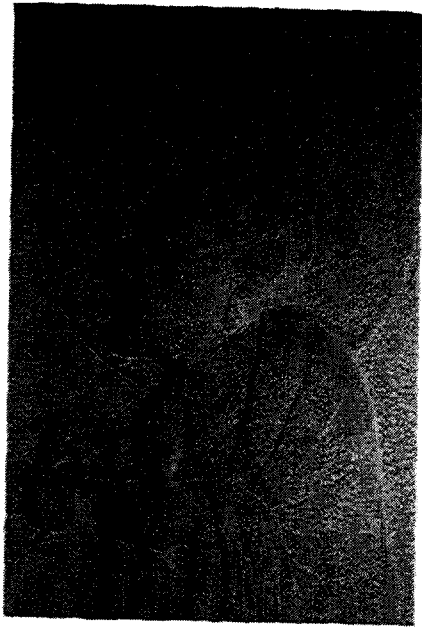
Map showing the location of the site and the protection zone



Sokkuram : vue extérieure de Sokkuram /
Exterior view of Sokkuram



Sokkuram : principale représentation
du Bouddha /
Main Buddha image



Sokkuram : détail de l'un
des Dix Disciples /
Detail of one of
the Ten Disciples



Sokkuram : détail de Bodhisattva /
Detail of Bodhisattva