WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Samaipata (Bolivia)

No 883

Identification

Nomination: El Fuerte de Samaipata
Location: Province of Florida, Department of Santa Cruz
State Party: Republic of Bolivia
Date: 30 June 1997

Justification by State Party

The huge rock known as El Fuerte de Samaipata, which is carved with a great variety of animal and geometric shapes, together with the niches, channels, and containers, is charged with religious significance. The work is carried out with great artistry and mastery of the material, giving it high expressive and aesthetic quality, impressive visual effects, great symbolic and communicative potential, and a marked sensitivity towards the material itself and the environment. However, it is not only the quality of the sculpture but also the creativity shown by those responsible for the work and its relationship with the space around it that distinguishes Samaipata.

Criterion i

There are no monuments comparable with Samaipata anywhere else in pre-Columbian America. It is an original expression of rock art on a gigantic scale, the cultural content of which, combined with its setting within its environment, make it unique. Such is the rarity and complexity of the monument that its significance and purpose remain the subject of scientific study. It seems to combine several functions, among them those of a ceremonial centre and of a residential settlement which, moreover, met the requirements of successive cultures that occupied the site, from before the Inca.

Criterion iii

The magnitude of the task of carving the great rock must have required the involvement of many artists, craftsmen, and labourers under firm direction. When considered in conjunction with the size and quality of the excavated settlement, this testifies to the presence of people who had attained a high level of material, cultural, and administrative development.

Criterion iv

This archaeological site, located in the sub-Andean strip of the eastern Bolivian Andes, is a key zone for the better understanding of relations between the prehispanic cultures of the three macro-regions of Latin America: the Andean Sierra, the lower lands on the east, and the Chaco. Up to the present only the first of these has received the attention of the scientific and cultural world. Although it was part of the Inca empire, Samaipata can reveal much about its relations with the Chiriguanos and other peoples from the Chaco and the Grigotan plain.

Criterion vi

[Note Although the State Party does not make any proposals in the nomination dossier concerning the criteria under which it considers the property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List, those indicated above are inferred from the presentation of the justification in the nomination dossier.]

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a site.

History and Description

History

The site is known to have been occupied and used as a ritual and residential centre by people belonging to the Mojocoyas culture as early as AD 300, and it was at this time that work began on the shaping of this great rock.

According to the Spanish priest Diego de Alcaya, writing at the beginning of the 17th century, it was occupied in the 14th century by the Inca, who made it a provincial capital. This is confirmed by the features that have been discovered by excavation - a large central plaza with monumental public buildings around it and terracing of the neighbouring hillsides for agriculture - which are characteristic of this type of Inca settlement. It formed a bulwark against the incursions of the warlike Chiriguanos of the Chaco region in the 1520s.

The strategic location of the site, which had attracted the Inca to it, was also recognized by the Spaniards. It is uncertain when they moved into this region. The frontier of the Viceroyalty of Lima was consolidated on the eastern side of the Cochabamba Valley in the 1560s, however, the silver mines of the Cerro Rico at Potosí began to be worked in 1545 and this would have needed supplies of manpower and food, both of which would have been sought further to the east, in the region of Samaipata. It was also important to construct fortresses for use against the marauding Chiriguanos. What is certain is that the colonial settlement of Samaipata had become an important staging post on the highway from Asunción and Santa Cruz to the colonial centres in the High Andes such as La Plata (modern Sucre), Cochabamba, and Potosí.

With the establishment of the new town of Samaipata in the Valle de la Purificación, the ancient settlement had no further military importance and was abandoned. It was quickly covered with vegetation and only visited by treasure hunters and herdsmen. However, the memory of El Fuerte (the Fort) was kept alive by the local people. It first came to the notice of scholars at the end of the 18th
century, and has been studied intensively since the beginning of the present century.

Description

The archaeological site of Samaipata consists of two elements: the hill with its many carvings, believed to have been the ceremonial centre of the ancient town, and the area to the south of the hill, which formed the administrative and residential quarter.

The reddish sandstone hill, the summit of a natural prominent feature orientated east-west, is divided naturally into a higher part, known as El Mirador (The Lookout), and a lower, where the carvings are located. The latter, measuring c. 220m by 50m, covers roughly 1ha.

The carvings in the western part include two felines on a circular base, the only examples of high-relief carving in the whole site. The remains of a stone wall of the Inca period cut across a number of the carvings, indicating a pre-Inca date. These include two parallel channels which may have served for conducting water to the settlement below. Between and alongside them there are smaller channels cut in zigzag patterns, giving rise to the local name for this feature, El Dorso de la Serpiente (The Snake’s Back).

At the highest point is the so-called Coro de los Sacerdotes (Choir of the Priests). This consists of a deeply cut circle (7m outside, 5m inside diameter) with triangular and rectangular niches cut into its walls. Further to the east is a structure which probably represents the head of a feline. It is noteworthy that felines and snakes were closely linked with the sun in Inca religion.

Most of the southern face of the rock was originally dominated by a series of at least five temples or sanctuaries, of which only the niches cut into their walls survive. These niches vary widely in size, shape, and orientation, the analysis of which makes it possible to assign the temples to the Inca period.

The so-called Casa Colonial is situated on an artificial platform at the foot of the rock. Excavations have revealed evidence of Inca and pre-Inca structures here, and so it is known as the Plaza of the Three Cultures. The house of the colonial period, only the stone lower walls of which survive, is in characteristic Arab-Andalusian style, with a central open courtyard. The upper courses of the walls were most likely built in adobe; it is believed originally to have been a two-storied structure. Nearby are the ruins of two Inca houses, probably dismantled by the Spaniards to build their own house.

Other features cut into the rock include the remains of two Inca houses, similar to others known from Machu Picchu, and the Templo de los Cinco Hornacinas (Temple of the Five Niches), also of Inca type.

Away from the rocky hill, there is a number of isolated small buildings surrounded by perimeter walls, a typical Inca form known as kancha. One of these contains two buildings and another five, arranged in a U-pattern. Another group of three has been shown by excavation to overlie the remains of two pre-Inca houses.

There is an impressive series of at least nine cultivation terraces on the east and south of the rock. They are interconnected by means of stone steps and have a sophisticated system for drainage.

The main administrative-religious centre of the Inca period is situated on a series of three artificial platforms to the south of the rock. The main feature is an enormous building (68m by 16m) known as the Kallanka; it is on the lowest platform and faces the ceremonial area on the rock across a spacious plaza. The lower levels of its walls, 1.4m thick, are constructed in dressed stone, the upper courses being in adobe. The fortunate discovery during excavation that the western wall had collapsed as a single piece made it possible for its height to be established as 12m. There are eight entrances on the north side, each 3.4m wide. These typical symbols of Inca power are to be found in many important centres (though their exact function remains unknown).

To the west of the Kallanka and on the second platform is a group of at least twelve large or medium-sized houses, laid out in the form of an H, provisionally known as the Akllawasi. These have not yet been excavated, but local tradition maintains that large vessels with “decayed women’s clothing” in them were found in their interiors. These are interpreted as remains of the textiles woven for ritual purposes or exchange by the Virgins of the Sun, whose name akllas is given to this group.

On the third platform there is a group of seven Inca houses disposed round an open space on an artificial mound. Once again, there are traces of earlier occupation below the Inca houses. These are considered to be in the Mojocoya style, which was widely distributed in eastern Bolivia between AD 200 and 800.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The archaeological site of Samaipata was designated a National Monument by Supreme Decree No 2741 of 21 September 1951 under the provisions of the National Monuments Act. This covered 20ha of the archaeological area; 260ha around the site were donated to the State by the landowner in 1997.

The total area is protected by Municipal Ordinance No 5/97 of Samaipata Municipality as an eco-archaeological park.

Management

The site belongs to the Bolivian State, and overall responsibility for its preservation and protection is delegated to the National Directorate for Archaeology and Anthropology (Dirección Nacional de Arqueología y Antropología - DINAAR), part of the National Secretariat for Culture (Secretaría Nacional de Cultura) of the Ministry of Human Development (Ministerio de Desarrollo Humano).

In 1974 the Archaeological Research Centre of Samaipata (Centro de Investigaciones Antropológicas y Arqueológicas de Samaipata - CIAAS) was created by Supreme Decree No 11290. It is responsible for the following: excavation of the archaeological deposits; systematic conservation and restoration of the...
archaeological deposits; display of cultural materials; and scientific publication.

There is a number of regional plans in force which give special consideration to Samaipata, and in particular to the need to develop a viable tourism policy.

**Conservation and Authenticity**

**Conservation history**

A number of excavations have taken place at Samaipata since the 1960s. Since 1992 there has been a major research project in progress sponsored by the University of Bonn (Germany).

Conservation began with the creation of CIAAS in 1974. These have largely been preventive measures designed to control vegetation and provide adequate security. A number of research topics have been identified to provide better protection against damage from climatic factors, and work has begun on these in association with US universities.

The areas excavated by the University of Bonn team have been conserved and consolidated using modern techniques.

**Authenticity**

The authenticity of the site is very high, since it has been deserted for centuries and only recently the subject of carefully controlled scientific excavation projects.

**Evaluation**

**Action by ICOMOS**

It was not possible for the ICOMOS expert mission to take place before this evaluation was prepared for printing. However, the distinguished specialist in the Andean prehispanic cultures who commented on the cultural significance of the site also commented on its conservation and management.

**Qualities**

The rock carvings at El Fuerte de Samaipata are remarkable testimony to a form of religious symbolism unknown elsewhere in the world on such a monumental scale.

**Comparative analysis**

The Samaipata site is believed to be unique in its scale and complexity.

**ICOMOS recommendations for future action**

The problem of the degradation of the rock sculptures under the influence of a sub-tropical climate with wide extremes of temperature and heavy rainfall is one that requires further study as a matter of urgency. ICOMOS hopes that international support can be secured for intensive research directed towards the solution of this threat to the long-term stability of the site.

ICOMOS proposes that the buffer zone around the site should be extended to the road that passes to the south of the site, so as to prevent the erection of structures that may have an adverse impact on the site as seen from this road.

**Brief description**

The enormous sculptured rock at Samaipata, which dominates the town below, is a unique and exceptional testimony to prehispanic cultural traditions and beliefs, without parallel anywhere else in the Americas.

**Recommendation**

At its meeting in June 1998 the Bureau referred this nomination back to the State Party, requesting a redefinition of the buffer zone as proposed above. Revised maps have been supplied by the State Party, incorporating the proposed modifications to the buffer zone.

ICOMOS therefore recommends that this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria ii and iii**.

**Criterion ii**: The sculptured rock at Samaipata is the dominant ceremonial feature of an urban settlement that represents the apogee of this form of prehispanic religious and political centre.

**Criterion iii**: Samaipata bears outstanding witness to the existence in this Andean region of a culture with highly developed religious traditions, illustrated dramatically in the form of immense rock sculptures

ICOMOS, October 1998