

# 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

Our Ref. GB/AS/1535/IR

Charenton-le-Pont, 20 December 2016

H. E. Mrs Kuni Sato  
Permanent Delegation of Japan to UNESCO  
100, Avenue de Suffren  
75015 Paris

World Heritage List 2017

## **Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region (Japan) – Interim Report**

Dear Madam,

As prescribed by the revised Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention and its Annex 6, the Advisory Bodies have been requested to submit a short interim report for each nomination by 31 January 2017. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation process.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to "Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region" was carried out by Mr Christophe Sand (New Caledonia) from 6 to 12 September 2016. The mission expert highly appreciated the availabilities and support provided by the experts in your country for the organisation and implementation of the mission.

On 7 October 2016, a letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information on the following issues: better justification of the components and particularly of component 8 (Shimbaru – Nuyama Mounded Tomb Group), changes of worship practices and related sources of information, continuity of the worship practices after the direct worship on Okinoshima ceased, development projects, further followed by an ICOMOS note sent on 3 November in response to a request for clarifications from the State Party. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 14 November 2016 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

At the end of November 2016, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2017. The additional information, together with mission and desk review reports were carefully examined by the Panel members. This process will conclude in March 2017.

We thank you for the availability of your Delegation to the meeting held on 25 November 2016 with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. The exchanges during this meeting were of great help for the third part of the ICOMOS Panel meeting. During its last part meeting, the Panel has identified areas which would require the need to review, augment and possibly reconfigure the nomination dossier.

We would be pleased if the State Party could consider the following points:

The ICOMOS Panel noted that the nomination seems to combine two strands, one concerning the early rituals related to worship for safe navigation that focus mainly on the Island of Okinoshima, and the second related to the emergence of more structured rituals base of the worship of personified deities that has continued until today and that are associated to female deities enshrined in shrines on Okinoshima, on the Island of Oshima and at locations on Kyushu Island that altogether have developed into the Munakata Taisha, from the name of the Munakata Clan that exerted control over Kyushu Island.

The early worship that took place on Okinoshima between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD are attested by an exceptional amount of archaeological evidence and findings but the whole scope of information that surely have been yielded by the study of these remains is not fully explained in the nomination dossier. The abundance in archaeological evidence of performed rituals dating back to the above-mentioned period seems to be mainly concentrated in Okinoshima and much less rich in Oshima or at the shrine locations on Kyushu.

On the ground of the information contained in the nomination dossier, in the additional information as well as in a number of desk reviews, the ICOMOS Panel has found that the first strand of the nomination, concerning the early rituals carried out at Okinoshima, offers the most promising potential for this nomination.

On the other hand, the second thread of the nomination, which focuses on the worship of the Three Goddesses of Munakata Taisha and on the way in which the Island of Okinoshima has been incorporated into more formalized rituals that developed in the emerging Japanese centralized state, appears very important in Japan but does not suggest a supranational significance.

The ICOMOS Panel therefore considered that only the Sacred Island of Okinoshima might have the potential to meet the requirements for Outstanding Universal Value, but this has not been demonstrated yet nor has it been justified for the entirety of the nominated serial property.

The ICOMOS Panel considered that to this end, there would be the need to refocus the nomination on Okinoshima and the early rituals and to see more developed the description of the historical, cultural and political context in which the early worship on Okinoshima arose: the nomination dossier mentions very early overseas exchanges that would be reflected by the objects found on Okinoshima, however this aspect is only limitedly addressed in the current nomination. More information is necessary about the scientific evidence - not limited to the Island of Okinoshima – of the economic and cultural exchanges in East Asia – of the polities that were engaged in these exchanges, in their dynamics and how these exchanges are attested to in different places in the Japanese Archipelago, on the Korean Peninsula, on the coastal strip of the Asian Continent and other islands.

The nomination dossier explains that three different types of ancient rituals were found on Okinoshima but they have not been sufficiently explained, nor has been explained what these differences tell us about those who performed those rites, what type of change they reflect and how they can be explained in relation to the material used for votive offerings.

The dossier also mentions that the rituals were meant to invoke safe navigation, but provides almost no detail about the maritime routes, the stop overs, the vessels that were used or about whom performed these rituals, where or when they were performed (e.g. before, during or after the travels). The nomination dossier refers to other sites in the region where similar ritual sites have been found and more explanation would be needed about differences, similarities and possible linkages with rituals carried out at those sites.

In this regard, the comparative analysis would deserve to be further developed focusing on the Eastern Asian region and on other examples of ritual sites related to safe maritime travelling and on sacred islands.

ICOMOS is aware that the range of interrelated issues mentioned above requires a substantial change in the nomination strategy and would welcome a feed-back by the State Party on the ICOMOS's proposal by **28 February 2017 at the latest**, the deadline set out in paragraph 148 of the Operational Guidelines for supplementary information on nominations to be received. Please note that any information submitted after this date will not be considered by ICOMOS in its evaluation for the World Heritage Committee.

We thank you for your support of the World Heritage Convention and the evaluation process.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gwenaëlle Bourdin', written in a cursive style.

Gwenaëlle Bourdin  
Director  
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

Copy to Agency for Cultural Affairs, Monuments and Sites Division, Cultural Properties Department  
UNESCO World Heritage Centre