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## Sacred Island of Okinoshima (Japan) No 1535

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### Official name as proposed by the State Party

Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region

### Location

Fukuoka Prefecture  
Japan

### Brief description

Located 50km off the western coast of Kyushu Island between the Japanese Archipelago and the Korean Peninsula, the Island of Okinoshima bears witness to early ritual practices associated with maritime safety, which emerged in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD and continued until the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD, at a time of intense exchanges between the polities in the Japanese Archipelago, in the Korean Peninsula, and on the Asian continent. Incorporated into the Munakata Grand Shrine, the Island of Okinoshima continued to be regarded as sacred in the following centuries up until today.

### Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a serial nomination of eight *sites*.

## 1 Basic data

### Included in the Tentative List

5 January 2009

### International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

None

### Date received by the World Heritage Centre

27 January 2016

### Background

This is a new nomination.

### Consultations

ICOMOS consulted its International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management and several independent experts.

### Technical Evaluation Mission

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 6 to 12 September 2016.

### Additional information received by ICOMOS

ICOMOS sent a letter to the State Party on 7 October 2016 requesting additional information on the following points: the rationale for the selection of the components; the sources of information regarding the worship practices, their changes, the history of the shrines and their transformations, and the date of establishment of the Miare Festival; and the ongoing or planned development projects.

Following clarifications sought by the State Party and provided by ICOMOS, the State Party responded on 14 November 2016 and the information provided is integrated into the relevant sections of this report.

Following the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel, an Interim Report was sent to the State Party on 20 December 2016, explaining that the ICOMOS Panel had found promising the aspect of the nomination dealing with the Sacred Island of Okinoshima and its early rituals and requesting further information on the historical, cultural and political context and exchanges in which the early rituals on Okinoshima arose; details on the early rituals, their change and the performers of these rituals; details on the maritime routes, stopovers, vessels, destinations; and an additional comparative analysis focusing on similar ritual sites and sacred islands in the eastern Asian region.

On the request of the State Party, two skype meetings were held in January 2017 with a view to providing further explanation on the content of the Interim Report.

The State Party formally responded on 28 February 2017 and the additional information provided has been integrated into the relevant sections of this report.

### Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

10 March 2017

## 2 The property

### Description

The nominated property of the Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites comprises a series of eight component parts, which include the Island of Okinoshima and three islets in the vicinity of the island – Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguiwa, forming the Okitsu-miya shrine; two components on the Island of Oshima, Okitsu-miya Yohaisho and Nakatsu-miya shrines; and two components on Kyushu Island, Hetsu-miya shrine, which concludes the system of shrines forming Munakata Taisha (or Munakata Grand Shrine), and the Shimbaru-Nuyama Mounded Tomb Group, forming the burial places of the members of the Munakata Clan.

The key element of this nomination is the Island of Okinoshima, which is located some 50km off the western coast of Kyushu Island between the Japanese archipelago and the Korean Peninsula.

A number of taboos abound on Okinoshima: no women are allowed on the Island, all visitors need to purify themselves through a ritual bathing (*misogi*), absolutely nothing can be taken from the Island, and visitors are prohibited to speak of anything they have seen or heard on the Island; restrictions on food and language also apply.

The Island of Okinoshima has yielded much evidence of votive offerings along the slopes of the southern side of the island. Archaeological campaigns have revealed different forms of worship and have allowed reconstruction of their chronology throughout the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD: rocktop rituals (late 4<sup>th</sup>–early 5<sup>th</sup> century), rock-shadow rituals (late 5<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century), partial rock-shadow rituals (late 7<sup>th</sup>–early 8<sup>th</sup> century) and open-air rituals (8<sup>th</sup>–late 9<sup>th</sup> century). Research has brought to light 22 ritual sites and over 80,000 votive offerings, many of which are of exquisite workmanship and have been brought from overseas (Korea, China but also Sasanian Persia).

Okitsu-miya (component 1 to 4), Munakata Taisha  
The Okitsu-miya shrine includes the Island of Okinoshima itself with three additional islets or attendant reefs (Koyajima, Mikadobashira, Tenguiwa) which are part of the ritual approach, functioning as natural *torii* (ceremonial gates of access to Shinto shrines).

Okitsu-miya shrine includes two buildings: the main hall and the worship hall, erected in the close vicinity of open-air ritual sites.

On the northern part of the island is preserved a primeval forest which is revered as a shrine forest.

Oshima Island: Okitsu-miya Yohaisho (component 5) and Nakatsu-miya (component 6), Munakata Taisha  
On the Island of Oshima there exist two places of worship: Nakatsu-miya and Okitsu-miya Yohaisho.

At Nakatsu-miya shrine the goddess Tagitsuhime is venerated. The component includes the shrine complex as well as the Mitakesan ritual site, located at the top of Mount Mitakesan, and the path leading to it.

The orientation of Okitsu-miya Yohaisho would indicate that this place was created to worship the Island of Okinoshima.

According to the nomination dossier, at the Mitakesan site, open-air rituals were practiced between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, based on the evidence emerging through archaeology.

Links with Okitsu-miya would relate to the Grand Festival and the Miare Festival (a revival of medieval tradition), during which the three goddesses re-join at Hetsu-miya.

Hetsu-miya, Munakata Taisha (component 7)  
Hetsu-miya shrine is located on the main Island of Kyushu, near a river, on land which was once part of a

small sea islet. The place includes also a ritual archaeological site, Shimotakamiya, halfway between the Hetsu-miya shrine building and Mount Munakata: there, votive offerings similar to those found at Okinoshima's ritual sites and at the Mitakesan ritual site on Oshima are reported to have been discovered. However, no details about archaeological excavations and studies are illustrated.

The nomination dossier underlines that the rituals carried out at the Munakata Taisha were of state rather than local importance, as the nascent Yamato state is said to have contributed to sponsoring them to secure maritime routes and to recognise the role of the Munakata Clan in the region.

Shimbary-Nuyama Mounded Tombs (component 8)  
The last component includes a group of 41 funerary mounds built by the Munakata Clan on a plateau overlooking the sea islet and with a visual connection with Okinoshima. The tombs exhibit different typologies – key-hole shaped tombs, rounded tombs, and one squared tomb; they date back to the late 5<sup>th</sup> through to the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to the nomination dossier, these tombs are indisputably associated with the chiefs of the Munakata Clan.

#### History and development

Extensive research on the Island of Okinoshima has revealed a wealth of archaeological discoveries attesting to early ritual practices associated with safety in maritime navigation between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Recent investigations in the region have shed light on the emergence of this phenomenon of ritual practices in relation to maritime travel and exchanges between the polities in the Japanese archipelago and those on the Korean Peninsula and the eastern coast of the Asian continent.

Little was explained about this aspect in the nomination dossier; therefore ICOMOS sought further information through its Interim Report.

Additional information was provided by the State Party in February 2017 expanding on this aspect.

Similar discoveries as those recorded on Okinoshima have been made on other islands in the Seto Inland Sea as well as on the Korean Peninsula. This has contributed to a reconstruction of the maritime routes that were used during those centuries for long-distance trade and exchanges in the region, and the extent of those exchanges, from the type of objects and votive offerings found at those sites, and the ritual practices that accompanied the uncertainties of overseas travel.

Three different early maritime routes have been identified through archaeological investigations. The Munakata route and the Iki-Tsushima route, which could be considered two alternatives for a northern route; and the southern route, used from the 8<sup>th</sup> century due to changed circumstances in the Korean Peninsula and

technological advances in boat construction. The first part of all the routes was more or less the same and crossed the Seto Inland Sea and a number of ritual sites have been identified on several islands in this stretch of sea, including the World Heritage property of Itsukushima Shrine.

Archaeological evidence and documentary sources confirm that during the period in which votive offerings were made on Okinoshima, the polities of the Japanese archipelago were engaged in exchanges and contacts with polities in the Korean Peninsula and the Chinese territories. Such exchanges were accompanied by rituals related to safe navigation.

Boats heading to the Korean Peninsula and Chinese coasts navigating along the Munakata route would have exited the Seto Sea and sailed along the northern coast of Kyushu to cross the stretch of open sea from the Munakata region. An alternative route was the one crossing the ocean via the Iki and Tsushima Islands.

Until the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the boats in use were 'semi-structured boats' or junkozosen, while in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, 'structured' and larger boats, or kozosen, appeared. This technical advancement allowed for safer navigation on the ocean and the use of new maritime routes along the south of the Japanese Archipelago to reach the Chinese coast, at a time when the political situation on the Korean Peninsula impeded contacts between Japanese and Korean states.

Four types of rituals have been identified on Okinoshima: rock-top rituals (from the late 4<sup>th</sup> to early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD); rock-shadow rituals (late 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century AD), partial rock-shadow rituals (late 7<sup>th</sup> to early 8<sup>th</sup> century AD) and open-air rituals (8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century AD).

In each phase, different types of objects were found from various provenances, shedding light on the changing relationships and contacts with other polities in the region and further afield.

For instance, changes in the political scene on the Korean Peninsula, the Chinese continent and in the Japanese Archipelago, including the spread of Buddhism into Japan in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, affected the exchanges and also the ritual practices.

Open-air rituals and associated sites are attested to on Oshima Island, on the top of Mitakesan Mountain, and on Kyushu Island at the Shimotakamiya ritual sites on the slopes of Mount Munakata.

From the late 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards, archaeological investigations have confirmed that rituals on Okinoshima were no longer performed.

The emergence of the Yamato court amongst competing regional polities pursuing the establishment of a centralised and institutionalised polity was accompanied by the restructuring of ritual practices and beliefs. In this

process, an important role appeared to be played by the Munakata Clan as overseers of one important maritime route to the Asian mainland, and a reconfiguration of rituals in the Munakata region seems to have taken place. An account of this is provided by two chronicles: the *Kojiki* (712 AD) and the *Nihonshoki* (720 AD), in which the myth of the three goddesses associated with the Munakata Clan and the names of Okitsu-miya, Nakatsu-miya and Hetsu-miya are mentioned.

Members of the Munakata Clan presided over the shrine compound until the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when the descendants of Munakata Daiguji inherited the role and carried it out until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the lineage was interrupted. The role of the Shrine declined significantly and the religious duties were carried out separately at Hetsu-miya by the *sha-ke* (12 priestly families) as expressed in the Daiguji family's records, amongst which was the *Munakata Ujimori kotogakian*, compiled in 1313. At Okitsu-miya and Nakatsu-miya, rituals were continued by the Ichi-no-Kai Kono and Ni-no-Kai Kono families.

Following the Meiji Restoration, the Munakata Shrine, as with all Shinto shrines, was placed under the management of the government and in 1901 the Shrine was ranked amongst the most important in Japan. In 1942 the Munakata Shrine Revival Association worked to renew the shrine compound and repair the buildings. In 1946 a religious corporation was created for the management of the shrine compound and in 1977 the name was changed to Munakata Taisha.

Archaeological research on Okinoshima was carried out on three occasions between 1954 and 1971; Tombs 1 to 6 were excavated between 1976 and 1980, while at the Mitakesan ritual site the first archaeological investigations date to 2010.

#### Hetsu-miya

The earliest record of the Hetsu-miya shrine buildings dates back to 1119 AD and subsequent reconstructions or repairs were also recorded; in 1675 the secondary and tertiary shrines of Hetsu-miya were moved to their present location, while its first visual representation appears in the *Tashima-no-miya shato koezu*, compiled between 1624 and 1644.

#### Nakatsu-miya

Nakatsu-miya is mentioned in the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*, although the first record of the existence of the Mitake shrine and buildings dates back to the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century. In 1797, a drawing of the island and its shrine buildings appeared in the geographical record *Chikuzen-no-kuni*. The shrine building was rebuilt in 1928 and designated in 1971 as an Historic site as part of the Munakata Shrine Compound, and various interventions are documented after formal protection was granted.

#### Okitsu-miya Yohaisho

The records indicate that this place of worship dates back to the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century and slightly later for the building (1784 and 1797). The actual building is a

reconstruction dated 1933, which was further repaired in 1974, after it was designated an Historic site.

Okinoshima and Okitsu-miya

Historical records report that a guard was ordered to be stationed at Okinoshima to serve for a 50-day period.

The first record of the existence of the Okitsu-miya shrine buildings on Okinoshima dates back to 1644. The first visual illustration of Okinoshima and Oshima dates back to 1797. The current main hall and worship hall were reconstructed in 1932.

### **3 Justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity**

#### **Comparative analysis**

The State Party has conducted an extensive comparative analysis examining properties containing islands where the island itself is regarded as sacred or is an object of worship, and properties including archaeological evidence of ritual sites of indigenous religions, examining whether these sites exhibit evidence of changes in ritual practices. The comparison has been conducted worldwide and includes 18 World Heritage properties worldwide. Within the relevant geo-cultural region of East Asia, a further 18 properties have been examined, 17 of which are included on the World Heritage List and one, Chungmakdong site, is not. In Japan 21 properties, including sacred islands and mountains, have been analysed.

However, ICOMOS considered that this analysis required further deepening in relation to other ritual sites and, in particular, sacred islands in the region, including Japan but not limited to it.

ICOMOS noted that, with regard to the formation of peculiar Japanese forms of religious beliefs, the comparative analysis carried out in the nomination dossier recognises that Itsukushima Shinto Shrine (Japan, 1996, (i), (ii), (iv) and (vi)) exhibits a similar pattern of development and also enshrines one of the deities of the Munakatata Taisha. The additional information confirms that rituals related to safe navigation have been recorded also on this island at Mount Misen, therefore demonstrating a similar pattern of development in rituals.

However, the nomination dossier holds that Okinoshima would outrank Itsukushima because of the rich archaeological evidence found at Okinoshima. Additionally, the nomination dossier holds that the main value of Itsukushima resides in the architectural structures.

The sacred place of Sefa-utaki at the Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu (Japan, 2000, (ii), (iii) and (vi)) is said to hold similarities as it was a place from where the sacred Island of Kudakajima was worshipped from afar, thereby exhibiting some

similarities with the nominated property. However, in this case the Island of Kudakajima was not part of the nomination.

ICOMOS considers that both sites show substantial similarities with the nominated property, and in both cases the justification refers to the development and survival of indigenous beliefs based on nature and ancestor worship that has survived up until today. In both cases the Outstanding Universal Value of these properties has been built around criterion (ii) and (vi) amongst other ones. Therefore, in ICOMOS's view, both properties illustrate values and cultural phenomena similar to those exhibited by the nominated serial property.

ICOMOS also noted that other islands in Japan claim a similar or analogous sacred status as Okinoshima, most notably Shikanoshima near Fukuoka, not far from Munakata; Enoshima near Tokyo; and Chikubushima in Lake Biwa near Kyoto. Among those islands, only Shikanoshima, the site of Shikaumi Shrine, has features similar to Okinoshima (a tripartite main deity, three distinct cult sites, sea-related rituals, and a very long history).

ICOMOS considered that the comparative analysis required deepening with regard to the closest comparatives, especially those related to early rituals and safe maritime navigation. However, the results of the comparison carried out so far pointed towards the relevance of Okinoshima only, in consideration of its richness in archaeological evidence and purported longer continuity of worship.

ICOMOS, in its Interim Report, asked the State Party to expand the comparative analysis with a focus on the East Asian region and other examples of ritual sites related to safe maritime navigation and of sacred islands, in order to ascertain whether Okinoshima may deserve consideration for the World Heritage List.

The State Party responded on 28 February 2017 expanding on the ritual sites that have been identified on islands in the Seto Inland Sea – Itsukushima, Takashima, Ourahama, Ujishima Kitanohama, Kojinshima and Obishima – and on sites along the Korean coast – Chonhejing on Wando Island, where the Silla conducted State rituals, Yondandon on Jeju-do Island, where rituals for safe navigation were performed, and Hyunbori on Ulleung Island. At all these sites, evidence suggests that rituals did not continue for as long as on Okinoshima. The closest comparator remains Chungmakdong site where Baekje-conducted state rituals were performed in which Yamato also participated.

ICOMOS considers that the additional information has substantially enriched the initial comparative analysis and has provided a much better context to understanding the emergence and development of the early rituals recorded on Okinoshima in a period of

intense maritime exchanges between Japanese, Chinese and Korean polities.

However, ICOMOS considers that the importance of the Munakata Clan within the emergence of a Yamato court-centred state and the stature assigned to, and progressively acquired by, the Munakata Shrine within a context of political and ideological restructuring of the powers and control over the territory, appears of national importance rather than global or regional. Therefore, the inclusion of the other components, which mainly reflect the high rank of this Clan at the time of early efforts to achieve a centralised state overseeing the polities of the Japanese Archipelago, and particularly component 8 – Shimbaru Nuyama Mounded Tombs Group, within the nominated property, does not appear justified.

ICOMOS therefore considers that the comparative analysis suggests that only Okinoshima Island may deserve consideration for the World Heritage List.

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ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of only Okinoshima Island for the World Heritage List.

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#### **Justification of Outstanding Universal Value**

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- The series as a whole reflects a tradition of continued worship of the sacred Island of Okinoshima as it has evolved in a process of dynamic overseas exchanges, passed down to the present day and linked with a living tradition of offering prayers for maritime safety.
- The Island itself retains exceptional evidence of 500 years of different forms of worship, and this also holds true for Oshima, at Mount Mitakesan, and on the main Island of Kyushu. Okitsu-miya, Nakatsu-miya and Hetsu-miya continue to perform their function as worship shrines of Munakata Taisha.

ICOMOS noted that the arguments proposed to justify consideration of this property for the World Heritage List were not supported by sufficient evidence. Many aspects required further explanation and clarification.

In particular, ICOMOS noted that the purported continuity of worship was not proven, particularly when noting that worship practices ceased on Okinoshima in the 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

For instance, the State Party mentions the reference to the shrine names in the *Nihonshoki* and *Kojiki* but this reference in written texts only provides evidence of the names of these shrines – which indeed remained unchanged – but not about their location.

ICOMOS therefore sought additional information in this regard in its first request for additional information. The State Party responded on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2016 providing a more detailed chronology, that integrates data from archaeological evidence and from written sources. This indicates that only the Hetsu-miya shrine is mentioned in written records since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, whilst the first record of the Okitsu-miya shrine dates back to the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. The chronology also reports that the Hetsu-miya shrine was relocated in 1675, therefore suggesting that the present locations of these shrines may not necessarily coincide with past ones.

ICOMOS also notes that the nomination dossier and additional information report about the locations of enshrinement of the Munakata deities; however, it seems that differences exist among the written sources with regard to the places of enshrinement of three goddesses. Apparently, this matter was settled only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The additional information provided by the State Party in November 2016 in response to the first ICOMOS queries do not dispel the interrogatives around the ways in which the continuity of worship can be understood; the establishment of the Munakata Shrine rather seems to suggest a restructuring of the sacred meanings and associated rituals.

Whilst the idea that the continuity of the religious importance of Okinoshima was favoured by changes and adaptation appears interesting, ICOMOS noted that further information was needed to ascertain whether the property could be considered exceptional as a witness to sacred island worshipping.

A number of other aspects appeared not sufficiently explained, e.g. the establishment of the taboos and restrictions, and the notion of 'state rituals' versus 'local rituals'.

An analysis of how worship and ritual practices changed and what role was played by the emergence of an imperial court-centred polity in this region of the Japanese archipelago was necessary, to place this phenomenon in its proper context and to achieve a better understanding of the reasons why worship practices based on votive offerings and conducted directly on Okinoshima ceased in the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

Some further explanations were also necessary with regards to the gap in findings on Okinoshima for the period between the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries, as this represents an interruption also of the purported continuity of ritual practices between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Additionally, ICOMOS found that, assuming that the remains found at Mount Mitakesan on Oshima and in elevated points in Kyushu (7<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries) demonstrate the worship of the Island from afar, therefore establishing continuity with the worship in

Okinoshima, this was not sufficiently proven. It could only prove that similar rituals were performed at these locations.

In fact, the nomination dossier and the additional information provided in November 2016 indicate that the first testimony of the worship of Okinoshima from afar is said to be the rock engraving at Oshima dating back to 1750 in relation to Okitsu-miya Yohaisho. The explanation provided in the nomination dossier relates to the difficulty of the priestly family, who were stationed at Oshima, to perform their worship obligations on Okinoshima. On the other hand, guards were ordered to be stationed at Okinoshima from 1639 onwards to control the distant view of the sea and watch over potential foreign approaches.

ICOMOS found that the continuity of worship between the phase of ritual practices on the Island and the worship of the Munakata deities was not ascertained, as too many interrogatives on how and why the rituals changed, what they implied in the different stages, and what were the meanings associated with these rituals, remain unexplained.

In summary, ICOMOS found that the nomination dossier and the additional information provided in November 2016 have not been able to demonstrate how and to what extent the change in early worship rituals of undefined entities or natural forces focused on Okinoshima, to venerating personified deities, expressed by the serial property exceptionally reflects universal processes. It rather appears that what is being celebrated through the series is the important role and rank of the Munakata Clan and, subsequently, of their shrine, at the time when the Yamato court was making efforts to establish an early centralised state in the Japanese Archipelago, which expresses national values.

On the other hand, ICOMOS has found very promising the aspect of the nomination related to the early rituals for safe maritime navigation, as the findings shed light on both early ritual and propitiatory practices and political-economic and cultural interchanges between the polities based on the Japanese archipelago and those on the Korean Peninsula and on the eastern shores of the Asian continent.

Therefore, ICOMOS in its Interim Report asked the State Party to provide further explanation on the maritime routes, other places where similar ritual sites have been found, and on the differences, similarities and possible linkages with rituals carried out at other places in the region.

The State Party responded on 28 February 2017 expanding in a substantial way on the historic-political and cultural context (see History and Development and Comparative Analysis sections in this report for more details).

The additional information provided in February also addresses the concerns that the taboos and restrictions seem to have been recorded only since the 17<sup>th</sup> century and not earlier. Therefore, their existence, although very interesting, does not seem to date back a long time.

On the basis of the additional information provided by the State Party, which was helpful in clarifying the historic-cultural context in which Okinoshima worship emerged, and elements of the Island and the sea forces cult, ICOMOS considers that the sacredness of Okinoshima appears to precede the establishment of the Munakata Taisha and the shrines on Oshima and on Kyushu Island, and that the focus remains on Okinoshima, the other shrines playing a role because of the existence of the Island and of its worship but they do not appear to bear exceptional universal value in themselves.

ICOMOS therefore considers that the justification proposed applies to Okinoshima only, with its attendant reefs, and not to the series as a whole.

### **Integrity and authenticity**

#### **Integrity**

The State Party holds that the nominated property fulfils the conditions of integrity under the different facets of the *Operational Guidelines*. It would include all attributes that reflect its proposed justification for inscription as a testimony of the formation of a cultural tradition based on the worship of a sacred island and transmitted to the present. The property is said to be of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the processes related to its significance, and at all shrine sites forming Munakata Taisha, elements of early rituals and later rituals coexist. All components enjoy legal protection at the national level.

The attributes are said to be overall in good condition, although development has impacted on the Shimbaru-Nuyama Mounded Tomb Group.

The clarification on the rationale of the series provided by the State Party in November 2016 and on the inclusion of Component 8, the Mound Group, does not justify its inclusion, as it only illustrates the role of the Munakata Clan within the political realm of the Yamato court, thereby holding national significance for historic-political reasons.

The integrity of this component is also more affected than other ones by specific issues, including the post-Kofun period reworking of the landscape, and the presence of various roads, particularly one of national importance crossing the site from side to side.

The nomination dossier and the additional information provided in November 2016 and February 2017 have not clarified how the serial property as a whole could outstandingly reflect universal value, given that the

nominated series of Munakata Grand Shrine or Munakata Taisha are clearly closely related to the role played by the Munakata Clan in the political adventure of the Yamato Court as overseers of one of the maritime routes heading to the Korean Peninsula and therefore are related to national values rather than regional or global ones.

On the other hand, Okinoshima bears testimony to a worshipping tradition of a sacred island to propitiate safe long-distance seafaring which has been incorporated into more formalised forms of rites related to the worship of deities associated with the Munakata Clan.

The integrity of the Island of Okinoshima is limitedly impacted by the harbour and by two concrete facilities used by the fishermen.

Therefore, ICOMOS considers that only Okinoshima Island with its attendant reefs – Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa – satisfies the conditions of integrity as required in the *Operational Guidelines*.

On the other hand, ICOMOS considers that the systems of shrines now forming Munakata Taisha encompass important views and other areas or attributes that are functionally important as a support to the property and its protection and may therefore be usefully included in the buffer zone.

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ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity have not been met for the entire serial property but can be considered to be met by Okinoshima Island alone with its attendant reefs – Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa.

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#### Authenticity

The nomination dossier holds that the authenticity of the property is proved by a substantial body of evidence of archaeological research and by textual sources that demonstrate the authenticity of the ancientness of the ritual sites of Munakata Taisha, that would have originated from the early rituals on Okinoshima, and of the Mounded Tomb Group. These sources demonstrate the authenticity of the components as places of worship.

ICOMOS considers that the attributes of the property, particularly the archaeological remains on Okinoshima, demonstrate continuity for the Island only, particularly between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, with some gaps between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, and also attest to changes in ritual practices, partly clarified in the additional information provided in February 2017.

On the other hand, the attributes related to the other components are not able to reflect the 500 years of continuous worship as at Okinoshima, in that recorded remains do not cover this full span of time but are restricted to later centuries.

The textual sources as presented in the nomination bear witness to the recognition of the Munakata shrines in the

ancient chronicles of Japan compiled in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and the role of the Munakata Clan within the emerging centralized power of the Yamato court among other polities but not directly to the sacredness of Okinoshima.

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In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have not been met for the entire serial property but can be considered to be met by Okinoshima Island alone with its attendant reefs – Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa.

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#### Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (ii), (iii) and (vi).

Criterion (ii): *exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that Okinoshima exhibits important interchanges among the different polities in east Asia between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, because the many objects with a variety of origins deposited at Okinoshima attest to the many travels and exchanges undertaken in this period by the emerging Japanese state (Yamato period). The changes in ancient rituals reflect the nature of the process of dynamic exchanges that took place in those centuries and that substantially contributed to the formation of Japanese culture.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion may be reflected by Okinoshima in particular, with the wealth of votive offerings deriving from Korea, China and even from central Asia, but not for the other components of the nomination, which rather reflect the incorporation of the island into ritual practices associated with the three protective deities of the Munakata Clan and celebrating the role acquired by this Clan in the nascent Yamato court-centred state.

ICOMOS, in its Interim Report, requested additional information on the maritime routes, the existence of other ritual sites in the region related to safe navigation, and the similarities and differences in ritual practices that could support the justification for this criterion.

The State Party responded on 28 February 2017 expanding on the historic-political and cultural context in which the ritual practices associated with Okinoshima took place, on the maritime routes used in the different centuries, and on the exchanges between the Japanese, Chinese and Korean polities. This information revealed that a number of islands exist where ritual sites related to maritime safety have been recorded, both in the Japanese Archipelago and along the Korean peninsula. In the majority of the cases, these sites have not revealed the same density and time depth in the votive offerings found through archaeological investigations as at Okinoshima.

However, ICOMOS has noted that the research developed on Okinoshima and its historic-cultural context sheds light on important and original dynamics in the maritime exchanges, on the technologies being progressively made available, and on the uses and cultural/cult practices before the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD in the Japanese Archipelago and on the eastern Asian mainland.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified for the whole series but it is justified when only the Island of Okinoshima with its attendant islets – Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa – are considered.

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Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the property is an exceptional example of a cultural tradition associated with the worship of a sacred island that has evolved over time. Evidence of this is offered by the wealth of offerings that are found on Okinoshima in different locations, thereby attesting to the changes in rituals. The veneration of the Island and of natural features is said to have evolved into the worship of the three goddesses of Munakata, in three locations – at Okinoshima, Oshima and Kyushu Island – and this tradition continues to this day. The evidence of the role of the Munakata Clan in the overseas exchanges of the nascent Yamato court-centred state and who presided over the three shrines is provided by the Mounded Tomb group. The property also bears witness to the shift from worshipping natural forces to venerating personified deities associated with the Munakata Clan in shrines.

ICOMOS considers that the tangible evidence of the cultural tradition of island worshipping could be best illustrated by Okinoshima Island with the wealth of votive offerings found there attesting to these earlier ritual practices.

The State Party provided additional arguments to justify this criterion both in November 2016 and February 2017 and this has clarified why there is a gap in the archaeological evidence on Okinoshima between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as the circumstances that brought about the cessation of ritual practices performed on the Island after the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD, related to political changes on the Korean peninsula, which was unified under Silla rule, reducing the exchanges between polities based in the Japanese Archipelago and on the mainland.

The State Party has also provided further explanation on the continuity of worship of Okinoshima in relation to the other locations from where Okinoshima, and its *kami* (mysterious forces inhabiting natural phenomena), was worshipped. The pattern of rituals led to the progressive differentiation of the *kami* of Okinoshima, into three different *kami*. This is reflected in the ancient

mythological written sources. The State Party has also expanded on the similarities between ritual practices held on Okinoshima, Oshima (Mount Mitakesan) and Kyushu (Shimotakamiya).

The additional explanation has contributed to clarifying that the worship of Okinoshima came to be embedded into rituals and worship practices that have evolved over time but seem to have maintained the sacred status of Okinoshima.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified for the whole series, but can be considered justified for the Island of Okinoshima and its attendant islets – Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa.

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Criterion (vi): *be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the Island is directly associated with the living tradition of praying for maritime safety, as a response to difficult overseas travels, and that Okinoshima bears witness to a spiritual and cultural tradition which survives until today and which was mentioned in the ancient chronicles of Japanese history *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*, which evolved into the cult of the Three Goddesses of Munakata. It tells much about how indigenous religious beliefs took shape in Japan. The Three Goddesses of Munakata came also to be worshipped in many Shinto shrines.

ICOMOS considers that the arguments presented to justify this criterion are more appropriate for criterion (iii). Additionally, ICOMOS considers that the mention of the three shrines of Munakata in the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* cannot be considered as a record for the worship of the Island. Rather, it appears as a recognition of the importance of the Munakata Clan, in the context of the emerging Yamato state, when the chronicles were written.

The various festivals, rituals and events held at the nominated property are the result of recent revivals and reinterpretation of previous rites, and therefore cannot be considered attributes supporting a long-standing tradition and exceptional testimonies of the associative dimension of the nominated property.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been demonstrated, either for the whole series, or for Okinoshima Island.

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In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that only the Island of Okinoshima with its attendant reefs – Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa – are found to meet criteria (ii) and (iii) and conditions of integrity and authenticity.

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### **Description of the attributes**

The entirety of the Island of Okinoshima, with its geomorphological features, the ritual sites with the rich archaeological deposits, and the wealth of votive offerings, in their original distribution, credibly reflect 500 years of ritual practices carried out on the Island; the primeval forest, the attendant islets of Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa, along with the documented votive practices and the taboos associated with the island, the open views from Kyushu and Oshima towards the Island, altogether credibly reflect that the worship of the Island, although changed in its practices and meanings down the centuries, due to external exchanges and indigenisation, has retained the sacred status of Okinoshima.

### **4 Factors affecting the property**

The nomination dossier identifies four main areas of pressures: urban and infrastructure development, environmental pressures and natural disasters, and excess of visitation.

ICOMOS considers major threats are represented by the possible construction of offshore wind turbines, which in ICOMOS's view should be completely banned from any area inside the buffer zone of the nominated property, and by unregulated tourism (e.g. diving) and cruise ships. The nomination certainly may contribute to an increase in visitation or tourism pressures.

ICOMOS also considers that specific considerations are necessary for component 5, Okitsu-miya Yohaisho, which, due to its position close to the sea, is prone to sea-related disasters (high tides, typhoons, etc.), and for components 6 and 7, which are prone to a number of potential threats, including flooding and fire, although the most important is represented by the possibility of construction of wind turbines and other energy production facilities (e.g. a photovoltaic farm already exists in the plain on the Island of Kyushu, in the buffer zone).

The State Party provided additional information in November 2016 concerning projects for transport and energy infrastructure that have already been carried out or are under implementation. The most significant development projects concern the improvement of the Kanazaki fishing harbour in Munakata City and a new photovoltaic facility.

ICOMOS considers that it would be advisable that Heritage Impact Assessments be prepared for these projects and the results submitted to the World Heritage Committee before any decision is taken with regard to their final implementation.

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are natural factors and potential development of energy infrastructure, especially offshore. Heritage Impact Assessments for planned major or potentially impacting

projects need to be developed and submitted to the World Heritage Committee and ICOMOS before any final decision is taken in their regard.

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## **5 Protection, conservation and management**

### **Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone**

The nominated serial property is 99 ha, its buffer zone is 79,363 ha, giving a total area of 79,462 ha.

On the basis of the considerations expressed in the section on integrity, ICOMOS considers that the current boundaries of the property are not satisfactory in that they include elements that do not seem to contribute to illustrating the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of Okinoshima as a sacred island.

In ICOMOS's view, the boundary of the nominated property should be reduced to cover Okinoshima Island with its attendant islets of Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa, while the extant component parts could become contributing features within the current buffer zone.

Additionally, ICOMOS considers that the limit at the top of the mountain marking the south-eastern corner of the buffer should incorporate entirely the summit.

ICOMOS considers that the buffer zone can be considered overall adequate.

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ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated property can be considered adequate only if the serial property is confined to Okinoshima Island and the three neighbouring islets of Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa, while those of its buffer zone are adequate.

### **Ownership**

The ownership is complex and is articulated as follows. Component 1, Okinoshima, is owned for the most part by Munakata Taisha (religious order) and in small part by a Fishermen's Cooperative; components 2,3,4, Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa, belong to the National Government (reefs are managed by Munakata City); component 5, Okitsu-Miya Yohaisho, Munakata Taisha, is owned by Munakata Taisha; component 6, Nakatsu-Miya, belongs to Munakata Taisha and in part to Munakata City and Fukuoka Prefecture; component 7, Hetsu-Miya, is owned for the most part by Munakata Taisha and in small part by Munakata City and by individuals; and component 8, Shimbaru-Nuyama Mounded Tomb Group, is owned in part by Fukutsu City, and the remainder by Fukuoka Prefecture, a religious organisation, an agricultural cooperative and in small part by National Government and other individuals.

## Protection

The nominated serial property is designated as a group of sites under the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties (Law n° 214/1950) and enjoys subsequent designations as an Historic Site “Munakata Shrine Compounds” (consisting of Okitsu-Miya, Okitsu-Miya Yohaisho, Nakatsu-Miya, Hetsu-Miya); in 1971, and then in 2013 and 2015, the forest on Okinoshima was designated as a National Monument “Okinoshima Primeval Forest”; since 1926, under the Law for the Preservation of Historic Sites, Places of Scenic Beauty and Natural Monuments (1919). Further forms of protection are enjoyed by individual components of the property under different legislation (e.g. the “Main Hall and Worship Hall of Hetsu-Miya”, designated in 1907 as a Specially Protected Building under the Law for the Preservation of Ancient Shrines and Temples (1897)).

Other important laws and regulations include the Landscape Act (2004), on which basis the Munakata City Landscape Plan, and Fukutsu City Landscape Plan have been developed and the Land Use regulation: City Planning Acts.

The preservation, management, repair and presentation of Cultural Properties is in principle the responsibility of the owner or managerial body of each site. When necessary the national and local government provide financial and technical assistance. For any alterations, permission must first be obtained from the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs. The proposed changes are submitted to the Subcommittee on Cultural Property of the Council of Cultural Affairs (established by the government, including several members of Japan ICOMOS) that submit a report to the Commissioner. The Commissioner will make a decision based on that report.

In terms of traditional protection, Okinoshima has been protected by Munakata Taisha (the owner) and by people who worship the sacred island. The cultural traditions and the religious taboos in place restrict access to the island and forbid damaging acts, promote maintenance, and form an effective complementary customary form of protection.

With regard to the buffer zone, its protection is ensured by careful zoning. The legal control is based on a combination of various laws and regulations that apply, depending on the existing use of the land in each zone.

In the Marine area, the management measures are based on the Fukuoka Prefecture Marine Area Management Ordinance (the major instrument which controls the installation of offshore structures), Natural Parks Act, and Fishing Ports Act.

In the Land area, land use restrictions are based on the City Planning Act, Natural Parks Act, Forest Act, and Act Concerning Establishment of Agricultural Promotion Areas. The major legal instrument is the Landscape Act (2004), developed in Munakata City Landscape Plan and Fukutsu City Landscape Plan (2014) and Landscape

Ordinances. The buffer zone is designated as a Priority Landscape Area.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place is adequate and, in principle, the protective measures in place appear to be effective both for the serial property and the buffer zone.

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ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place is adequate. ICOMOS considers that the protective measures for the serial property are adequate.

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## Conservation

### Components 1-4

Very few active conservation measures can be identified on Okinoshima. The main action is the regular maintenance of the path leading to the ritual site and then to the top of the Island. To prevent the process of erosion, a number of deviating channels have been built using crude concrete materials along the path leading to the Okitsu-miya shrine building: these will need to be better integrated into the environment in the future. The policy on the archaeological ritual sites is to let the vegetation grow, without cleaning for example the top of the boulders where the phase 1 rituals had taken place around stone altars.

The main conservation measures are linked to the wooden building and structures of the Okitsu-miya shrine and those leading to it. Maintenance work is regularly carried out on the main shrine, with a major restoration program planned in the near future.

### Component 5

The state of conservation of the shrine of component 5 is regularly monitored by Munakata Taisha and the local worshippers, and any repair needed is approved after expert advice by trained public specialists. There is private, local and national funding allocated for these repairs and for the general maintenance of the building. The local community is in charge of the cleaning of the site and its general maintenance on a daily basis.

### Component 6

Nakatsu-miya shrine is permanently monitored by Munakata Taisha and by the State. Daily repair of the buildings and maintenance of the tree cover is carried out by the local community at the request of the priest of Munakata Taisha. For more significant repairs or monitoring, specialists are employed. Funding is provided by Munakata Taisha, and local and national agencies. The everyday maintenance of the Mitakesan ritual site is carried out by the local community.

### Component 8

Active measures were taken in 2013 to prevent further collapse at tomb 25, by stabilizing and reconstructing the eroded slope. Tomb 30 might also be given this type of conservation measure soon. Monitoring of the high tomb 22 has also been carried out. The tombs that are positioned directly inside the large grain silo compound are taken care of appropriately, as after 35 years they

have still not been flattened. But aside from this, there does not appear to be a coordinated process for the restoration of the site on a long-term basis.

In the additional information submitted in November 2016, the State Party provided details of the conservation management plan for the Mounded Tomb Group (Component 8). This documentation points in the right direction to ensure its appropriate conservation and management as an archaeological site.

Archaeological research has been carried out extensively at Okinoshima and to a lesser extent at the other sites of worship. This research has yielded much information that has contributed to the understanding of the dynamics of exchanges, maritime routes and associated early ritual practices. However, many questions are still open with regard to the changes of the rituals, the abandonment of the direct worship practices on Okinoshima, and the implications of the changes from worshipping natural forces to worshipping deities enshrined in built shrines.

ICOMOS considers that research needs to be continued on Okinoshima and also at the other locations where evidence of rituals similar to those carried out on Okinoshima have been found, in Japan and neighbouring countries. This appears particularly important in order to further shed light on the polities ruling in the Japanese Archipelago, the Korean Peninsula and the eastern coasts of Asia, on the economic, political and cultural exchanges amongst them, and on the accompanying ancient rituals in a context of East-Asian emerging states and cultural-political self-awareness.

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ICOMOS considers that conservation actions have been undertaken for most of the components of the property. In some cases, the materials used could be more harmonised with the setting. Research programmes on maritime exchanges, navigation and related cultural and cult practices need to be continued and expanded within Japan and the neighbouring countries.

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## Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

The Management system will be based on a Preservation and Utilization Council, which will replace the current Promotion Committee established for the purpose of the nomination.

After inscription of the property, the State Party and the regional entities will create an overarching body, the Preservation and Utilization Council, which consists of the representatives of Munakata City and Fukutsu City and Fukuoka Prefecture. The Munakata Taisha and other owners, as well as the representatives of the residents in the buffer zone and of the local businesses, will coordinate and collaborate with the Preservation and Utilization Council. The national Agency for Cultural Affairs is expected to provide guidance and advice as

well as an ad-hoc Advisory Committee, encompassing experts, universities and ICOMOS Japan.

The Council will be in charge of coordinating the fulfilment of the "Preservation and Management Plan" that has been prepared as part of the nomination dossier.

Risk-preparedness has been addressed within the framework of the management.

ICOMOS considers that the role of Munakata Taisha and the other owners in the management system is not fully clear, as they seem not to be included in the Council.

ICOMOS further considers that the Council needs to be established and the roles and relationships with external entities need to be clarified.

Experts from Fukuoka Prefecture, Munakata City and Fukutsu City form the main staff core, in coordination with Munakata Taisha, in the short- and long-term management of the different components of the property. The Agency for Cultural Affairs (national) provides technical instruction on any repair or restoration work to be done on protected sites. There is no dedicated full-time staff responsible for maintaining the heritage of Okinoshima Island. In all, 15 administrative staff and 20 experts in Heritage (archaeology, history, architecture) are employed by the Prefecture, the two Cities and Munakata Taisha. In case of need, they can rely on a larger network of Heritage professionals at the research level (University) and national level. They attend on a regular basis training courses organized by regional and national institutions.

Policy framework: management plans and arrangements, including visitor management and presentation

A Comprehensive Preservation and Management Plan for the "Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region" was adopted in January 2016 by Munakata City, Fukutsu City and Fukuoka Prefecture. This incorporates four Individual Preservation and Management Plans, for the different components: Preservation and Management Plan for Historic Site "Munakata Shrine Compounds"; Preservation and Management Plan for Natural Monument "Okinoshima Primeval Forest"; Preservation and Management Plan for Important Cultural Properties "Main Hall and Worship Hall of Hetsu-Miya, Munakata Shinto Shrine"; and Preservation and Management Plan for Historic Site "Tsuyazaki Mounded Tomb Group".

Management actions and the assessment of alterations are displayed in the individual plans. For each shrine and shrine building, the plans identify zones provided with specific regulations and conservation policies; evaluating whether reconstruction, refurbishment or removal, or relocation are permitted or not.

The management plan includes a detailed description of the risk-preparedness measures for the individual components.

The components included in the Munakata Taisha also enjoy a well-established form of traditional management under the Shinto religious order, which developed over time a set of traditional management processes, relying on different measures, including taboos. A large majority of them remain in place to this day: no access for women, ritual bathing for any man wishing to enter the Sacred Island, a ban on removing any item from the place etc. These taboos have been effective and their perpetuation by future generations should ensure the preservation of the open archaeological sites of the Sacred Island. At the other shrines, religious rules recommend access limitations in some areas, the ways in which ornamentation is positioned in the buildings etc. Minor repairs and everyday maintenance are fulfilled by craftsmen from the local community, using methods passed down from generation to generation.

Involvement of the local communities

At the local community level, not less than 26 different groups interested in heritage preservation have been listed in the Munakata region. They are responsible for keeping the different components clean or to highlight, through guided tours, the historical importance of specific sites.

ICOMOS considers that the management plan and its specific plans for each component is adequate and sufficiently detailed in its articulation to manage the different components. ICOMOS, however, considers it important that the management system gives due consideration to the potential increase in visitor numbers to the area and particularly to the island of Oshima and the waters around Okinoshima, as well as the potential impacts from cruise ships. The nomination process, in fact, will certainly attract attention and may result in undesirable patterns of visitation.

The management system should also ensure that mechanisms in place are effectively applied to avoid any further visual impacts from energy production facilities on the land and, more importantly, offshore.

ICOMOS considers that mechanisms to integrate an Heritage Impact Assessment approach and specific HIA processes, for major or potentially impacting projects, need to be envisaged and integrated into the management system.

ICOMOS considers that special attention is needed for managing the impacts of infrastructure facilities and towards the potential increase of visitors. In this regard, specific measures need to be identified, put in place and publicised to ensure responsible visitation.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the management system for the property will be adequate when the role of each stakeholder is clarified in relation to the function

and tasks of the Council. Furthermore, ICOMOS recommends that the organisation of the management system is finalised and put in place. Specific measures to ensure that the values of the property are respected by visitors and tourism companies are needed. Mechanisms to integrate HIAs within the management system need to be developed and implemented.

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## 6 Monitoring

A monitoring system has been established identifying indicators related to the potential threats to be monitored periodically. Methods of measurement and frequency are in the Jurisdiction of Munakata Taisha, Munakata City and Fukutsu City (as owners), under the guidance of the Agency for Cultural Affairs through Fukuoka Prefecture.

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ICOMOS considers that the monitoring system is adequate.

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## 7 Conclusions

The nominated serial property of the Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites comprises a series of eight component parts, which include the Island of Okinoshima and three islets in the vicinity of the island – Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguiwa – forming the Okitsu-miya shrine; two components on the smaller Island of Oshima, Okitsu-miya Yohaisho and Nakatsu-miya shrines; and two components on Kyushu Island, Hetsu-miya shrine, which concludes the system of shrines forming Munakata Taisha (or Munakata Grand Shrine), and the Shimbaru-Nuyama Mounded Tomb Group, forming the burial places of the members of the Munakata Clan.

The property altogether is said to bear witness to a long cultural tradition of sacred island worship, documented by archaeological evidence, between the 4<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> century AD and, at the same time, to the changes in rituals and worship, away from natural forces, represented by Okinoshima, to deities, represented by the three goddesses protecting the Munakata Clan; and to the complex interrelations between the establishment of a Japanese centralised state and of its ruling elites, and changes in rituals and worship, in a period of intense oversea exchanges with polities based on the eastern Asian mainland and Korean Peninsula.

The worship of the island is said to have continued up to the present day, intertwined with the veneration of the Three Munakata Goddesses, enshrined in Okitsu-miya, Nakatsu-miya and Hetsu-miya, places of worship mentioned in the ancient chronicles of *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*, compiled in the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD and therefore the State Party suggests that the continuity of worship has expanded throughout the centuries until the present day.

The State Party has nominated the serial property under criteria (ii), (iii) and (vi) because: 1) Okinoshima and particularly its archaeological ritual sites and abundant finds bear witness to important interchanges with polities based in east Asia as well as to changes in ritual practices reflecting the dynamic exchanges that took place in those centuries and contributed to the formation of Japanese culture; 2) the property would be an exceptional example of a cultural tradition associated with the worship of a sacred island as it has evolved over time; 3) the island is associated with the living tradition of praying for maritime safety and of a spiritual and cultural tradition that was already mentioned in ancient chronicles.

The nomination dossier is elegantly presented and well organised. However, ICOMOS found it necessary to receive additional information that could support the purported continuity of worship, in relation to the fact that the practice of direct offerings on the Island ceased around the 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, as well as on the historic political and cultural context of overseas exchanges between Japanese and neighbouring polities, which was not sufficiently addressed in the nomination dossier.

Clarifications were also sought on the rationale for the selection of the components of the series.

The State Party has fully harnessed the opportunities offered by the expanded dialogue and has provided substantial additional information on the historic, cultural context of the maritime travelling of proto-historic Japanese polities to neighbouring powers and on the role played by ritual practices. This work has revealed a complex pattern of ritual sites on several islands, both in the Japanese Archipelago and along the coasts of the Korean Peninsula as well as information on the available technologies for maritime navigation and their relation to maritime routes. In ICOMOS's view, these exchanges deserve further exploration as they shed light on a still under-studied period and may yield rewarding research results. Therefore, ICOMOS would suggest all parties involved continue this type of research. The State Party has also provided useful information that has contributed to better explaining how the worship of Okinoshima has come to be embedded within the cult of the Munakata Goddesses and has also enriched the comparative analysis, identifying a number of other islands and sites where ritual practices related to safe navigation were performed.

On the basis of the additional information provided and on the comparative analysis carried out by the State Party and complemented by ICOMOS, ICOMOS has concluded that only four out of the eight components nominated by the State Party deserve consideration for the World Heritage List: Okinoshima Island and the three attendant islets of Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa. In the nomination dossier and in the additional information presented by the State Party, all arguments point toward the exceptionality of

Okinoshima. It is presented as a repository of exceptionally important information on early ritual practices and on the commercial, political and cultural exchanges during the centuries before the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD, between polities in East Asia and the Japanese Archipelago. It is also presented as an example of a sacred island, the sacred status of which has survived through the centuries, despite changes in practices and meanings.

The comparative analysis also suggests that the pattern of evolution of the Munakata Taisha does not appear dissimilar to many other Shrine complexes in Japan. Additionally, the Munakata Grand Shrine mainly reflects the important role played by the Munakata Clan as maritime route overseers, at the time when the Yamato Court was engaged in establishing a centralised state in the Japanese Archipelago, a status sanctioned through the mention of the Munakata shrines in the early Japanese chronicles dating back to the same period (8<sup>th</sup> century), therefore evoking values related to nation building rather than of global or regional significance. The Shimbaru-Nuyama Mounded Tombs Group, component 8, is clearly related to the Munakata Clan and therefore only reflects local and national significance, in the context of this nomination.

ICOMOS has found that Okinoshima, with the three attendant islets of Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa, justifies criteria (ii) and (iii) but not criterion (vi), as most of the arguments presented are more related to criterion (iii), speaking about national values. On the other hand, the taboos and the rituals seem not to have been codified before the 17 – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and appear therefore to be rather recent; the festivals and events appear to be recent revivals or reinterpretations of discontinued practices, which therefore cannot be considered attributes of a long-standing tradition and exceptional testimonies of the associative dimension of Okinoshima.

The Island of Okinoshima is properly protected and managed. In the series, the most problematic component appears to be the Shimbaru-Nuyama Mounded Tomb Group due to its state of conservation.

The management system needs to be strengthened by establishing the Preservation and Utilisation Council to replace the Promotion Council and by clarifying its role and relationships with external entities to ensure coordination, and a clear chain of responsibilities, so as to ensure any negative impacts from infrastructural development, particularly off-shore wind farms, or from increased presence of cruise ships, are properly managed.

Because of these considerations, ICOMOS recommends that the name of the property be modified to become "Sacred Island of Okinoshima".

## 8 Recommendations

### Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that only four of the eight components forming the nominated series of the Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region, Japan, namely the Island of Okinoshima and the three islets, Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (ii) and (iii)**.

### Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

#### Brief synthesis

Located 50km off the western coast of Kyushu Island, the Island of Okinoshima is an exceptional repository of records of early ritual sites, bearing witness to early worship practices associated with maritime safety, which emerged in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD and continued until the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD, at a time of intense exchanges between the polities in the Japanese Archipelago, in the Korean Peninsula, and on the Asian continent. Incorporated into the Munakata Grand Shrine, the Island of Okinoshima continued to be regarded as sacred in the following centuries up until today.

The entirety of the Island of Okinoshima, with its geomorphological features, the ritual sites with the rich archaeological deposits, and the wealth of votive offerings, in their original distribution, credibly reflect 500 years of ritual practices held on the Island; the primeval forest, the attendant islets of Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa, along with the documented votive practices and the taboos associated with the Island, the open views from Kyushu and Oshima towards the Island, altogether credibly reflect that the worship of the Island, although changed in its practices and meanings over the centuries, due to external exchanges and indigenisation, has retained the sacred status of Okinoshima.

**Criterion (ii):** The sacred Island of Okinoshima Island exhibits important interchanges and exchanges amongst the different polities in East Asia between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, which is evident from the abundant finds and objects with a variety of origins deposited at sites on the Island where rituals for safe navigation were performed. The changes, in object distribution and site organisation, attest to the changes in rituals, which in turn reflect the nature of the process of dynamic exchanges that took place in those centuries, when polities based on the Asian mainland, the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago, were developing a sense of identity and that substantially contributed to the formation of Japanese culture.

**Criterion (iii):** Okinoshima sacred Island is an exceptional example of the cultural tradition of worshipping a sacred island, as it has evolved and been passed down from ancient times to the present.

Remarkably, archaeological sites that have been preserved on the Island are virtually intact, and provide a chronological record of how the rituals performed there changed over a period of some five hundred years, from the latter half of the 4<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries. In these rituals, vast quantities of precious votive objects were deposited as offerings at different sites on the Island, attesting to changes in rituals. Direct offerings on Okinoshima Island ceased in the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD, but the worship of the Island did not cease, evolving and coming to be embedded into worship practices associated with the Munakata Shrine.

#### Integrity

The sacred Island of Okinoshima, with its three attendant islets of Koyajima, Mikadobashira and Tenguwa, comprise all attributes necessary to illustrate the values and processes expressing its Outstanding Universal Value. The property ensures the complete representation of the features illustrating the property as a testimony to a worshipping tradition of a sacred Island for safe navigation, emerging in a period of intense maritime exchanges. This has passed down to this day, through changes in ritual practices and meanings but whilst still retaining the sacred status of Okinoshima. The property is in good condition; it does not suffer from neglect and is properly managed, although careful consideration of potential impacts from off-shore infrastructure and increased cruise ship traffic is needed.

#### Authenticity

A substantial body of archaeological investigation and research on the Island of Okinoshima bears credible witness to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property; the unchanged location of the ritual sites, their distribution, and the still-abundant undisturbed deposits of votive offerings provide opportunities for future research and increased understanding of the values of the property. Existing restrictions and taboos contribute to maintaining the aura of the Island as a sacred place.

#### Management and protection requirements

The property enjoys legal protection at the national level under several laws, designations and planning instruments; protection is also guaranteed by traditional practices, in the form of restriction of use and taboos that have proven effective over time until the present day.

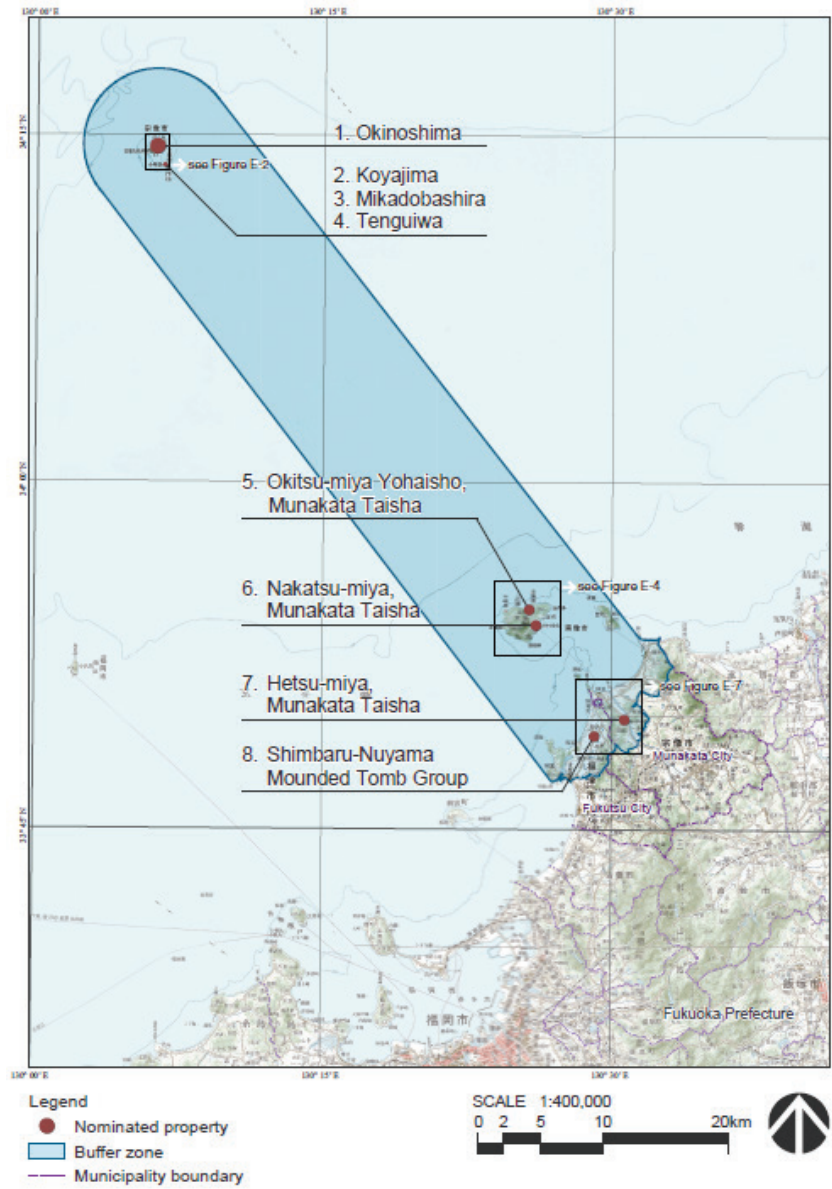
The management system envisages an overarching management body, the Preservation and Utilization Council, which includes the representatives of Munakata City and Fukutsu City and Fukuoka Prefecture. The Council is tasked with coordination of and responsibility for the implementation of the "Preservation and Management Plan", which incorporates four individual management plans covering different parts of the property as well as the buffer zone. To ensure full coordination and implementation of the management tasks, the owners of the property need to be involved in the Council; the representatives of the residents in the buffer zone and of

the local businesses will coordinate and collaborate with the Preservation and Utilization Council. The National Agency for Cultural Affairs provides guidance and advice as well as an ad-hoc Advisory Committee. Minor repairs and everyday maintenance are carried out by craftsmen from the local community, using methods passed down from generation to generation.

**Additional recommendations**

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party gives consideration to the following:

- a) Agreeing to the proposed change to the name of the property to become “Sacred Island of Okinoshima”,
- b) Establishing the Preservation and Utilization Council and including within it representatives of the owners of the property,
- c) Clarifying the role of the other stakeholders and the mechanisms to ensure their effective cooperation in managing the property,
- d) Stating that the construction of wind turbines, offshore or on land, will not only be “appropriately restricted” but will be totally forbidden within the entire property limits, including the buffer zone, as well as in areas outside the property where it would affect the visual integrity of the components,
- e) Setting up mechanisms to integrate an Heritage Impact Assessment approach into the management system,
- f) Developing specific HIAs for planned projects that may impact on the Outstanding Universal Value and the attributes of the property, and submitting their results to the World Heritage Committee and ICOMOS for review before any final decision is taken with regard to their approval and implementation,
- g) Confirming that the limit at the top of the mountain marking the south-eastern corner of the buffer zone, incorporates entirely the summit,
- h) Giving due consideration to the potential threats by increased unregulated visitation and cruise ships;



Map showing the location of the nominated properties





View of Okinoshima Island

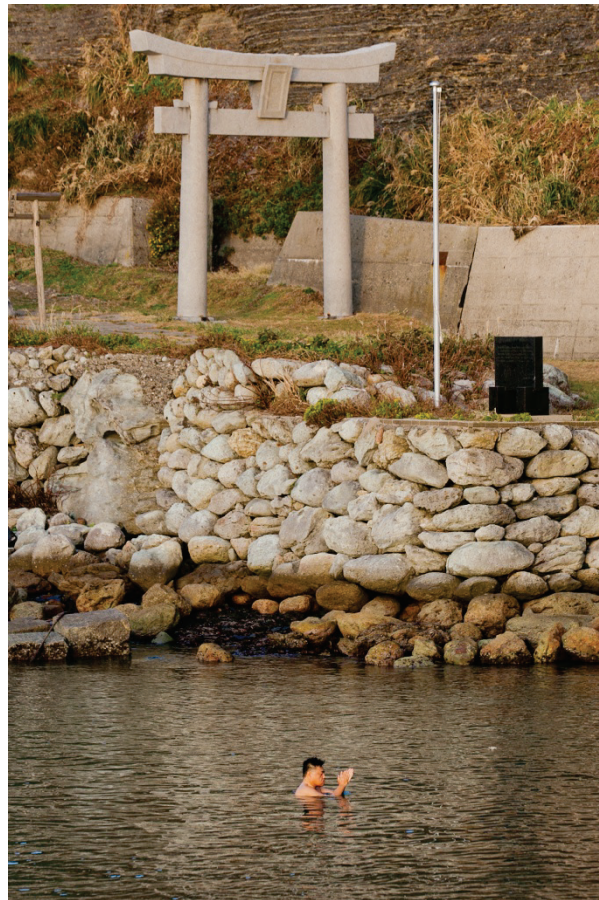


Shrine buildings in Okitsu-miya





Okinoshima primeval forest



Ritual purification