

BULGARIA

Rila Monastery

Brief description

Rila Monastery was founded in the 10th century by St John of Rila, a hermit canonized by the Orthodox Church. His ascetic dwelling and tomb became a holy site, and were transformed into a monastic complex which subsequently played an important role in the spiritual and social life of medieval Bulgaria. Destroyed by fire at the beginning of the 19th century, the complex was rebuilt between 1834 and 1862. The monument is a characteristic example of the Bulgarian Renaissance (18th–19th centuries) and symbolizes an awareness of a Slavic cultural identity following centuries of occupation.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription

1983

Agency responsible for site management

- National Institute for Cultural Monuments
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- Ministry of Culture
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2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria

C (vi)

Justification by the State Party

The property is proposed for inclusion in the World Heritage List. Reasons:

1. In its 10-century complicated history it has been the hub of a strong spiritual and artistic influence over the Eastern Orthodox world during medieval times (11th-14th c.). Under Ottoman rule (1400-1878) the monastery influenced the development of culture and arts of all Christian nations within the Ottoman Empire. With its architecture, frescoes etc. it represents a masterpiece of the creative genius of the Bulgarian people.

2. Architectural styles have been preserved on the property as historical monuments of considerable time span (11th-19th c.). The basic architectural appearance is now one of the peak examples of building craftsmanship of the Balkan peoples from the early 19th c. As such it has exerted considerable influence on subsequent developments of architecture and aesthetics within the Balkan area.

3. The defence tower, wholly preserved in appearance, is the only one of its size and artistic value in the whole Balkan Peninsula dating as far back as the 14th c. The Orlitsa Convent is a highly valuable example of how a productive complex for a large monastic community looked like in the 18th c. and the 19th c. The cemetery church with the charnel is another complex, which as a function and a combination of architecture and art, is also unique (well preserved edifices from the 18th-19th c., where the medieval bone-preserving rite has been performed; it was unknown elsewhere at that time.). The two hermitages, St.Luke and St.John Rilsky, are small architectural and artistic gems, preserved only here by the strength of the Eastern Orthodox traditions. There are no hermitages in other monasteries. The one at the grave of St. John Rilsky qualifies as an example of man's interaction with his natural environment. The original co-existence of the cave-dwelling and the grave church is an example of the synthesis between natural phenomena and man's cultural activity. In its character this is also a unique site for the whole Orthodox East. The monastery kitchen within the northern wing, with its construction, tectonics and architectural unity is unique too not only for the Balkan Peninsula but also for the whole Central and Eastern Europe. The great amount of monumental paintings (14th, 15th, 18th and 19th c.) and wood carvings represent an exclusive ensemble of high artistic value. The traces of Baroque influence in the frescoes and carvings of the 19th c. mark one of the ways of modern development of Eastern Orthodox art in this part of the world.

The qualities of different parts of the property, its rich and varied history, the value of its frescoes and carvings, the vast amount of museum collections show that the Rila Monastery qualifies on all counts for inclusion in the WHL.

Natural property:

The Rila Monastery is situated within the boundaries of a national park.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

Rila owes its present appearance to embellishments of the 19th century. The monastery, in the form of an irregular quadrilateral, presents a startling contrast between its exterior appearance, rugged as that of a fortress, and the rich decor of the arcades of its interior area, conceived as a cortile. In the center of the court, the church of the Assumption (1834-1860) is inspired by the constructions of Mount Athos in its structure, as well as its painted and sculpted decoration. In the south wing of the monastery, the museum (1962) replaces an older building spared by the fire of 1833 and by the restorers of the 19th century. ICOMOS is of the opinion that Rila Monastery, nearly entirely reconstructed during the contemporary period, and does not answer the criterion of authenticity.

Committee Decision

1983 Bureau: The nomination file should be revised in the light of the ICOMOS recommendations.

1983 Session: This property was not considered as a testimony of mediaeval civilisation but rather as a symbol of the 19th Century Bulgarian Renaissance which imparted slaviv cultural values upon Rila in trying to re-establish an uninterrupted historical continuity. The reconstruction of Rila (1834-1962) thus illustrates cultural criterion (vi) of the *Operational Guidelines*.

- Statement of significance adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site
- Additional change proposed by State Party: addition to Official Description and Statement of Significance

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: adequate

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

3. Protection**Legislative and Administrative Arrangements**

- Law: law on Cultural Monuments and Museums (1969)
- Laws on Religious Affairs and Property
- Commission regulating the prohibition regimes and the allowed activities in the area of the site and its protective zone, and the responsibilities

of the interested state and local institutions and owners (1992)

- The protection arrangements are considered not sufficiently effective

Actions taken/proposed: Amendment of the Cultural Monuments Act

4. Management**Use of site/property**

- Visitor attraction, national park (the site is within a larger nature reserve), religious use

Management /Administrative Body

- Steering group: does not exist at this time, but the Monastery is run by the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church
- There is no site manager at this time
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national; local; Orthodox Church
- The current management system is not sufficiently effective

Actions proposed: improvement of the coordination between stakeholders

5. Management Plan

- no management plan at this time, however there is support from zoning regulations and conservation planning

6. Financial Resources**Financial situation**

- Budget sources: main source is the Ministry of Culture, as well as through private ownership by the Orthodox Church
- WHF: funds received for seismic monitoring equipment
- Insufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- number of staff: not given

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Good: conservation
- Bad: management; interpretation; visitor management
- Average: promotion

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- Museum conservation facilities: National Art Academy
- Training on site management: National Institute for the Cultural Monuments

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 165,000 counted by ticket sales (2004)
- Trend: increasing
- Visitor facilities: limited guide facilities, rest areas and WC
- Visitor needs: transportation around the site, qualified visitor staff, information centre

10. Scientific Studies

- Risk assessment; Studies relating to the value of the site; Monitoring exercises; Condition surveys
- Studies used for: official reporting and statements regarding the status of the site
- Other: acknowledgement of value criteria

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- Not enough signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local communities, businesses, local authorities
- Web site available: www.bulgariatravel.org
- Local participation: restricted to the tourism facilities

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- World Heritage Bureau sessions: 18th (1994)

Conservation interventions

- Conservation: seismic monitoring, restoration and conservation projects including rebuilding of support walls, conservation of murals and paintings
- Present state of conservation: adequate

Threats and Risks to site

- Development pressures and tourism/visitor threats
- Emergency measures planned: amendments to the existing legislation

13. Monitoring

- No formal monitoring programme exists
- Measures taken: regular monitoring carried out by NICM
- Key indicators: hope to identify these

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, social aspects
- Strengths of management: change to protection and zoning for the site, a number of surveys and studies carried out, the most urgent restoration and conservation works have been completed
- Weaknesses of management: lack of management plan, lack of specialised management team, no site coordinator

Future actions:

- Amendment to existing legislation, with assistance from international experts