

GEORGIA

Upper Svaneti

Brief description

Preserved by its long isolation, the Upper Svaneti region of the Caucasus is an exceptional example of mountain scenery with medieval-type villages and tower-houses. The village of Chazhashi still has more than 200 of these very unusual houses, which were used both as dwellings and as defence posts against the invaders who plagued the region.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription 1996

Agency responsible for site management

- World Heritage National Committee, Ministry of Culture
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www.mc.gov.ge
- Mestia Historic-Ethnographic Museum (Chazhashi Museum-Reserve)
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2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria C (iv), (v)

- Change to criteria proposed: State Party proposed in Periodic Report to add criteria (ii), (iii), (vi) and (vii).

Justification as provided by the State Party

Excellent natural conditions, unique landscape of Upper Svaneti, unity of the architecture and the landscape impart an original imperious aspect to this land. An immense quantity of the grand monuments of monumental and minor art - jewelry, metalwork, manuscript illumination, textile and embroidery, wood-carving, icon-painting, most ancient forms of musical and oral folklore, wonderful monuments of the original dwelling architecture are of the paramount significance for the study of part of this region, as well as the research of the various periods in the history of Georgia and the Caucasus; accordingly, a great interest of the scholars of various spheres and countries toward Svaneti can easily be understood.

Monumental mural painting of Svaneti represents a significant, in certain cases the unique material, making it possible to judge of the formation and development of both Georgian and East Christian painting. A lot of works executed by Svan craftsmen being of a supreme artistic level, rightfully belong to the treasury of world art.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

The nomination dossier lacks any definition of the precise area being proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List. The "Description" section is wide-ranging, referring to important monuments all over the region. However, the only detailed documentation provided relates to the Ushguli-Chazhashi Museum-Reserve, for which a map showing "strict protective" and "protective" zones is supplied, and Zhibiani Village, in the form of a "passport" (an official survey record).

It is not clear whether it is intended that the entire Reserve designated in 1991 is intended for inscription or one or both of the two areas singled out for special documentary support.

In the opinion of ICOMOS it would be premature for the entire Reserve to be inscribed, since it is a new creation and its policies are still being formulated. The technical condition of Zhibiani Village is, according to the "passport", "in a grave condition", which would seem to disqualify it for inscription until action has been taken to remedy that situation. The Ushguli-Chazhashi Museum-Reserve, on the other hand, is clearly defined and has been in operation for several years. The best course might be for this area alone to be nominated at the present time, with the State Party retaining the option of extending the inscribed monument at some time in the future.

The ICOMOS recommendation that this nomination should be referred back to enable the State Party to delineate a representative and effectively managed and conserved area for inscription was approved by the Bureau at its meeting in June 1996. No response had been received when this document was prepared (September 1996); however, in the event of this being supplied and proving acceptable, ICOMOS recommends that this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria iv and vi:

The upper Svaneti region is an exceptional landscape that has preserved to a remarkable degree its original medieval appearance, notable for the distribution, form, and architecture of its human settlements.

Committee Decision

Bureau (July 1994): The Bureau deferred the examination of this nomination to enable the State Party to give a clearer indication of the area proposed, and provide more information on the conservation and management plan which is under preparation.

Bureau (June 1996): The Bureau recognized that the property fulfilled criteria (iv) and (v), but decided to refer this nomination back to the State Party to allow it to delineate a recognizable and representative area which could be effectively managed. ICOMOS stressed also that it would strongly support inscription of the Uzguli-Chazhashi Reserve under criteria (iv) and (v) in the event of this being confirmed as the nominated area by the State Party.

Bureau (December 1996): The Bureau recommended that the Committee inscribe this property on the World Heritage List on the basis of cultural criteria (iv) and (v) considering that the Upper Svaneti region is an exceptional landscape that has preserved to a remarkable degree its original medieval appearance, notable for the distribution, form and architecture of its human settlements.

Committee (1996): The Committee decided to inscribe the nominated property on the basis of cultural criteria (iv) and (v), considering that the region of Upper Svaneti is of outstanding universal value being an exceptional landscape that has preserved to a remarkable degree its original medieval appearance, notable for the distribution, form, and architecture of its human settlements.

- Statement of significance adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site
- Proposal for text has not been made by State Party but is requested
- Additional change proposed by State Party: Property must be extended and re-nominated as a cultural landscape with new criteria (ii), (iii), (vi) and (vii) and include whole historical area of Upper Svaneti

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries: inadequate
- The buffer zone has been defined, but still is not formally adopted as required according to the State Party national legislation
- Special programme aiming to revise and legalise the boundaries/buffer zone for Upper Svaneti is launched by the Georgian Ministry of Culture

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained. There have not been any significant changes in the authenticity and/or integrity of the site since inscription

3. Protection**Legislative and Administrative Arrangements**

- The protection of the Historical Monuments of Mtskheta is based on the law "On the protection of cultural heritage"
- The protection arrangements are not effective

Actions proposed:

- Definition of buffer zone and of the adequate protective regime within its limits
- Timeframe: 2005-06

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

- Paid visitor attraction, rural landscape

Management /Administrative Body

- The possibility of the establishment of the Steering Group is under examination in the Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sport of Georgia. This group may be created involving already existing Coordinators, NGOs, and national/local authorities as well as local community
- Site manager on full-time basis (Chazhashi Museum-Reserve)
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national
- The current management system is not effective

Actions proposed:

- Establishment/implementation of the appropriate management plan
- Reorganisation and capacity-building of the Chazhashi Museum-Reserve

5. Management Plan

- No management plan has been established
- Responsibility for establishment and overseeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sport of Georgia, Chazhashi Museum-Reserve

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- Subsidies from State Budget (through the Ministry of Culture) to the Mestia Museum to which Chazhashi Museum-reserve is subordinated : EUR 40000 approx. (staff salaries and administrative charges)
- 1999, Grant from Getty Institute for elaboration of the conservation plan (50 000 EUR); 2001, Grant from the Georgia CH Preservation Centre for the conservation of towers (16 500 EUR)
- Funding is insufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: 4

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

- Good: interpretation, education
- Average: conservation
- Very bad: management, promotion, visitor management

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

- Scientific institutes of the Georgian Academy of Sciences
- Conservation Laboratories of the Centre of Archaeology and National Museum; Conservation Chair of the Academy of Fine Arts
- No opportunities for the training on site management

9. Visitor Management

- No visitor statistics
- Visitor facilities: Permanent exhibition of the Chazhashi Museum
- Visitor needs: There is a need of skilled guides, promotional (printed, audiovisual and multimedia) products and of the development of tourist infrastructure and transport arrangements

10. Scientific Studies

- In 1999-2000 ICOMOS Georgian Committee supported by Getty Institute undertaken multidisciplinary study which included: full inventory of medieval settlement of Chazhashi, arts historical study, sociological study and,

engineering assessment of the technical condition, archaeological survey, reassessment of the outstanding universal value

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- No signs referring to World Heritage site. The State Party during the datasheet revision process added that signs will be arranged by the end of 2006
- World Heritage Convention Emblem is not used on publications
- Awareness of World Heritage among visitors, local communities, businesses, local authorities is not adequate
- There is a need of subsequent awareness-raising efforts through organization of seminars, exhibitions, lectures, dissemination of educational and promotional publications on the World Heritage sites and World Heritage Convention
- Web site: <http://heritage.gol.ge/worldherit.htm>

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- No significant conservation/restoration works has been conducted
- Present state of conservation: needs more resources

Threats and Risks to site

- Climatic conditions (severe winter), use of inappropriate materials (the repair works on the residential houses)
- Insufficient conservation capacities, lack of funding, lack of managerial capacities/policies and absence of the Management Plan, no buffer zones legalised

13. Monitoring

- Formal monitoring programme: Ministry of Culture, established the regular monitoring exercise for all World Heritage properties. Monitoring missions are regularly visiting all properties and are producing summary State of Conservation report every year
- Measures planned: State of Conservation reports will produce the framework for the establishment of conservation plans

- Key indicators: overall physical condition of residential houses and towers; materials used by Chazhashi inhabitants for the repair works on their residential houses

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: political pressure
- Weaknesses: Ineffective management system, overall lack of capacities and policies for protection and conservation, lack of cooperation between stakeholders

Future actions:

- Institutional reforming and capacity-building of institutions and professionals involved in the study, conservation, management and preservation of the site
- Implementation of the project, aimed to respond the main conservation issues
- Special project on the monitoring, documentation and conservation of Upper Svaneti
- Establishment of the appropriate Management Plan for Upper Svaneti
- Re-definition and legalisation of the buffer zones and protective regime
- Extension of the property with additional criteria

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund is needed for the implementation of these activities