

GREECE

Meteora

Brief description

In a region of almost inaccessible sandstone peaks, monks settled on these 'columns of the sky' from the 11th century onwards. Twenty-four of these monasteries were built, despite incredible difficulties, at the time of the great revival of the eremitic ideal in the 15th century. Their 16th-century frescoes mark a key stage in the development of post-Byzantine painting.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription 1988

Agency responsible for site management

- Hellenic Ministry of Culture – 19th Ephorate of Byzantine and Postbyzantine Antiquities
Terma Profiti Ilia, 42100 Trikala

Website: www.culture.gr

Ministry for the Environment, Spatial Planning & Public Works (YPEHODE)
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2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria C (i), (ii), (iv), (v) N (iii)

Justification provided by the State Party

A) BIEN CULTUREL: The Meteora Monasteries climbed upon the huge rocks are a unique example of a monastic community which still exists in function since the 14th cent. Only one example can be mentioned: The Monasteries on Mount Athos.

This monastic community survives as well as the gigantic rocks through out the centuries and will exist, while the mankind survives.

The construction of these Monasteries constitutes a unique phenomenon of superhuman dimension and faith in God. Besides the Monasteries on Mount Athos, in the Meteora Monasteries anonymous architects, craftsmen, laborers, and monks, too

worked for almost three centuries and built these enterprising monuments helped by their deep knowledge of the Byzantine Architecture and founded, even though the grave influences and borrowings of the Italian art, the Post Byzantine Architecture.

It is doubtless that, besides the Monasteries on Mount Athos, upon the group of the Meteora Monasteries experts, students, architects, archaeologists and simple visitors too, have the unique ability to study and understand deeply the post-Byzantine architecture with all its evolution and alternation.

It is not excess to say that a simple visiting at the Meteora Monasteries can substitute some years of university studies in byzantine ad post-byzantine architecture. Also upon the Meteora Monasteries famous painters, as Theophanes the Cretan, Frangos Katelanos, etc, who knew deeply the Paleologan prototype of the Byzantine Art, painted the churches and founded the Post Byzantine wall painting, even though the influences and the borrowings of the Italian Art were grave.

In the Meteora Monasteries and especially in the Monastery of Saint Nikolas Anapafsas painted in 1527 Theophanes the Cretan; this painter, who is considered the 'founder of the Cretan School of painting', gave the above School its classic character in the 16th cent., so that his technique has been subsequently identified with that of the Cretan wall painting. Theophanes' work has served as a point of reference for the art of in the period after the fall of Constantinople and more generally, for the tradition of iconography in post-byzantine times.

This painting, however, reached its peak in the 16th cent. with Theophanes and other contemporary and later talented artists, who worked at the Meteora Monasteries and on Mount Athos, that is to say, in various places outside Crete.

It is doubtless and not excess to say that at the Meteora Monasteries experts, byzantine- logists, historians of art and other scientists have the unique ability to study and deeply understand the meaning and the technique of the Cretan School of painting and generally the Post Byzantine iconography.

Also simple or expert visitors have the unique chance to see, to admire and to study the enterprising objects of art, such as icons, manuscripts, gospels, gold-embroidered vestments, gold and silverware, etc.

In concluding we would like to mention that the Meteora Monasteries are the group, where all the kinds of the entire Post Byzantine Art are completed.

B) BIEN NATUREL :

The gigantic and huge rocks of the Meteora upon which the Monasteries are founded are a unique geological phenomenon in all over the world, dated in 60.000.000 years ago, when the last formation of the earth took place in the district of Thessaly.

These rocks constitute a picturesque and a unique creature of the nature and a unique also example of the evolution of the earth, which, since these for millions of years have been existed till now adays without any alteration.

Since this rocky region is protected by the Greek legislation, construction is either prohibited, or limited, the land exploitation and hiring is under control, the rocky area and especially its natural environment have remained pure and virgin, inhabited only by monks and nuns and the inhabitants of the small village Kastraki.

This rocky area can be characterized as a unique monument of the nature and of the superhuman dimension, too.

As provided in ICOMOS/IUCN evaluation

ICOMOS recommends that the Meteora be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria I, II, IV and V. Criterion I. "Suspended in the air" (the meaning of Meteora in Greek), these monasteries represent a unique artistic achievement and are one of the most forceful examples of the architectural transformation of a site into a place of retreat, meditation and prayer. Criterion II. The frescoes executed in 1527 by Theophanes the Cretan became the basic reference of the fundamental iconographic and stylistic features of post-Byzantine painting, which exerted widespread, long-lasting influence. Criterion IV. The Meteora provide an outstanding example of the types of monastic construction which illustrate a significant stage in history, that of the 14th and 15th centuries when the hermitic ideals of early Christianity were restored to a place of honor by monastic communities, both in the western world (in Tuscany, for example) and in the Orthodox church.

Criterion V. Built under impossible conditions, with no practicable roads, permanent though precarious human habitations subsist to this day in the Meteora, but have become vulnerable under the impact of time. The net in which intrepid pilgrims

were hoisted up vertically alongside the 373-meter cliff where the Varlaam monastery dominates the valley symbolizes the fragility of a traditional way of life that is threatened with extinction.

IUCN: [May 1988] EVALUATION The sandstone pillars which form the foundation for the monasteries provide a striking setting which man has used to advantage. The natural values on their own are not of universal significance and the site is best evaluated on its cultural attributes. RECOMMENDATION The Meteora Group of Monasteries should not be added to the World Heritage List on the basis of its natural values.

Committee Decision

Bureau (1988): The Bureau recommended that this property be inscribed, on condition that the Greek authorities provide before the twelfth session of the Committee, confirmation that the protection of the entire area proposed for inscription is guaranteed by adequate legal measures.

Session (1988): The Committee accepted the ICOMOS proposal to add natural criterion (iii) to cultural criteria.

- Statement of Significance does not adequately define the outstanding universal value of the site. At the time of initial inscription the WH Committee did not approve a Statement of Significance for the site, which defined the outstanding universal value.
- Proposal for text has been made by State Party
- The Committee accepted the ICOMOS proposal to add natural criterion (iii) to cultural criteria

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
Cultural: The archaeological site has been delimited. The Central Archaeological Council, during its 26/5.07.05 Session, examined the issue of revision with the objective to clearly delimit the boundaries of the archaeological site of Meteora and specify its geographical coordinates. The boundaries of the Archaeological site of Meteora were re-defined by Ministry of Culture Decision 70206/3687(Government Gazette 1275/B/12/09/05)

Natural: The delimitation of the area in terms of the EU-wide NATURA 2000 network is adequate: all the important elements of the natural environment are included (habitats, areas where populations of species are

spreading, rare geo-morphological formations etc.)

- **Buffer zone:**

Cultural: The aim of the definition of the buffer zone is to include all remarkable monuments of the site, and to protect the natural rocky complex against interventions: this is done through the delimitation of a zone around the site where building is prohibited, and by setting conditions on the building activity at the settlements that have developed in the past on the foothills of Meteora, in order to prevent any negative impact on the archaeological site. The buffer zones are deemed adequate: Zone A (where building is prohibited) protects the monastery complex of Meteora and the surrounding area; buffer Zone B sets conditions on the construction of buildings in Kastraki-Kalambaka in order to avert any change in the area surrounding the Meteora rocks

Natural: The delimitation of the buffer zone has yet to be finalised, however, it is amongst the priorities of the Ministry for the Environment, Spatial Planning and Public Works. There is a documented proposal for the delimitation and the designation of the area of Meteora as a protected area

For the area of Meteora – Antichasia a Special Environmental Study has been drafted, and a Presidential Decree draft elaborated in order to declare the area under protection order, in accordance with article 21 of the Law 1650/86 “On the protection of the environment”. The same PD draft delimits individual buffer zones and defines the terms and limitations for projects and activities in these zones

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

- Significant changes:

Cultural: The restoration of the sections of the Meteora Monasteries that are collapsing or are derelict entailed positive changes in the integrity of the site. These changes were made through restoration work performed on the basis of studies approved by the Central Archaeological Council

- Major changes, which might have an impact in the future:

Cultural: The limited space on the flat terraces on the top of the rock formations, restricts the development of the monastery buildings; However, the need for such a development is becoming imperative due to an increase in the number of the individuals living under seclusion. Any interventions deemed

necessary, are met upon submission of requests by the monastic community of Meteora to the 19th Ephorate. The Ministry of Culture grants the necessary authorizations on the basis of relevant studies. It monitors thoroughly the implementation of these changes. Also, the increasing number of visitors-pilgrims goes hand in hand with the need to reconfigure spaces for their reception, their walking around the area etc.

Natural: The changes produced by the imminent enactment of the institutional framework and by the sustainable management of the area, are expected to have a positive impact on preserving the values of the natural ecosystems and the landscape. The uncontrolled activities and land uses – hunting, herding, farming, forest exploitation, waste management, building, infrastructure works, quarrying, sports activities (mountain climbing) etc. – may have adverse environmental effects on the natural and cultural environment

- Potential changes will not have an impact on the outstanding universal value of the site.

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- Cultural: The buffer zones of the archaeological site of Meteora have been delimited as follows: buffer Zone A protects the monastery complex of Meteora and the surrounding area; buffer Zone B sets conditions on the construction of buildings in Kastraki-Kalambaka settlements in order to keep intact the area surrounding the Meteora Rocks. For this reason, the Central Archaeological Council, during on 2005 decided to preserve the existing status, instead of extending the Buffer Zone B and reducing Zone A where building is prohibited and the revision of the boundaries of the Archaeological Site of Meteora. Also, a joint Ministerial decision by the Ministers for the Environment, Spatial Planning and Public works, and Culture delimits the boundaries of the Holy Meteora

- Natural: 1. Space of Community Interest (SCI) within EU-wide NATURA 2000 network by force of the Directive 92/43/EEC on the “conservation of habitats, and wild fauna and flora”, code number GR 1440003; 2. Special Protection Area (SPA) in accordance with the Directive 79/409/EEC “on the conservation of wild birds”, which by right is part of the EU-wide NATURA 2000 network (code n. GR

1440005); 3. Site of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

Actions taken:

- Natural: A Presidential Decree designating Meteora – Antichasia as a protected area, in accordance with article 21 of the Law 1650/86 “on the protection of the environment”, is under preparation

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Cultural: Religious use
- Natural: The use of the area for scientific research, environmental education, awareness building, and ecotourism purposes, is compatible with a rational, sustainable and durable development therein; therefore such a scheme is promoted by environmental legislation

Management /Administrative Body

- Plans to set up a steering group:
Natural: Concurrent to the designation of the area as a protected area (article 21 of the Law 1650/86) is an administration and operation formula on the basis of local parameters. In order for an optimum management of the area the organizational structure is formulated on the basis of objective criteria (significance, land surface, position, financial viability etc) and following consultations with the local community
- Site manager whose responsibilities have been added to an existing job
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national and local
- Natural: Except for the Ministry for the Environment, Spatial Planning and Public Works, the management of the natural environment in the area comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Development, the Ministry for Agricultural Development, of other competent Ministries in each instance, the Church, and the Region of Thessaly
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

Actions proposed:

Cultural: There is a prospect of establishing a management committee

Natural: The establishment of a Management Body is being promoted

5. Management Plan

Cultural: The management and protection of monuments and archaeological sites in Greece is not based on a concrete management plan. Greece has a system of protection, which is administered centrally by the Ministry of Culture through its regional services, i.e. the Ephorates of Prehistoric & Classical and Byzantine Antiquities. The Ministry of Culture is the competent body supervising the sites and overseeing all works carried out. As far as the safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage is concerned, there are cases where other competent bodies besides the Ministry of Culture are involved. The Ministry of Culture sets out the guidelines and the general policy for the management of the monuments and sites which is then implemented by the competent Ephorates. In the case of Meteora the 19th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities is responsible for the management and protection of the monuments. For the time being there is no management plan under preparation

Natural: The Management body to be established will have to elaborate and implement the management plan

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- State budget (Ministry of Culture)
- European programmes, 2nd & 3rd Community Support Framework (CSF)
- Sufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of full-time staff: 1

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

- Average: conservation, management, promotion, education
- Bad: interpretation, visitor management

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

- Cultural: so far, there isn't any particular expertise or training available to the staff, in situ or in other facilities

9. Visitor Management

- The exact number of visitors is not available, since it is the monasteries that issue the tickets.
- Visitor facilities: exhibitions set up by the monastic community, where souvenirs and representative items from the monastic life are on display, access ramps for the disabled; WC.

10. Scientific Studies

- Monitoring exercises; archaeological surveys; a special environmental study of the area of Meteora-Antichasia was been elaborated

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- An adequate number of signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local authorities
- Need for awareness raising: more information material
- A photo exhibition on the World Cultural Heritage was organized by the Ministry of Culture in 1998
- The monastic community has set up museums in every monastery, where information and guides on the monastery complex of Meteora are provided. Guide book on all the monasteries
- Web site available (web page at the Ministry of Culture's official website)

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

Since 1990, year of inscription of the site on the World Cultural Heritage List, important conservation, restoration and support works have been performed at the Holy Monastery of the Great Meteoron, the Holy Monastery of Varlaam, the Holy Monastery of St. Stephen, the Holy Monastery of Roussanou, the Holy Monastery of Holy Trinity and the Holy Monastery of St. Nicholas Anapafsas.

- Cultural: In the following monuments, which constitute annexes to other monasteries, the following works have been performed: on the initiative of the Monastery of Holy Trinity a)

Support work in the outside walls of the Monastery of St.Nicholas- Badova, which is a annex to the Monastery of Holy Trinity, and b) support work in the ascetic's cell of St. Antonius; on the initiative of the Monastery of the Great Meteoron, support work was performed in the Monastery of Hypapanti and restoration of the wall paintings of the catholicon

- Natural: An integrated programme for the protection of the natural environment is being promoted. This is done through the management plan under preparation, and the Special Environmental Study that has already been elaborated
- Present state of conservation: good

Threats and Risks to site

- Development pressure, visitor/tourism pressure
- Specific issues:
 - Cultural: Lately, also due to an increase in the population, private individuals submit requests for building activity in the settlements of Kastraki-Kalambaka on the foothills of Meteora, which would entail the reduction of buffer zone A and the extension of zone B. Because of the limited space on the flat terraces on the top of the rocky formations, where the monastery complexes have been developed, and also due to an increase in the number of monks, the monastic community submits requests for a restructuring of buildings. Such requests are dealt with on the basis of corresponding studies that are submitted for examination and approval by the Ministry of Culture. Also, the particularity of the area and the impact of natural phenomena on the monuments expose them to several risks that could bring about considerable damage. Hence, the 19th Ephorate, in collaboration with the monastic community, performs restoration and conservation work
 - Natural: There is considerable pressure due to an increase in the number of tourists in the area (camping), as well as development pressure, related to major works that may be performed in the future, such as road construction, installation of mobile telephony stations, creation of dams etc.

Emergency measures taken:

- Cultural: The problems are being dealt with, by means of a revision of the boundaries of the area, and in the studies elaborated by the monasteries and examined by the Ministry of Culture
- Natural: The management plan for the area of Meteora will implement an integrated

environmental protection and deal with any dangers that may be threatening it

13. Monitoring

- Cultural: No formal monitoring programme
- Natural: the Management Body responsible for the administration of the area will develop key indicators

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation (C), social (C), management (N). The environmental protection status is enhanced, as well as the commitment of Greece, being a State Party, regarding the implementation of the necessary measures to protect and preserve the integrity of the natural landscape (N)
- Cultural: Repair work has been executed in buildings, ensuring their protection against risks and increasing the number of visitors
- Natural: Delimitation of the area for the EU-wide 'NATURA 2000' network; elaboration of a Special Environmental Study and of a Presidential Decree which promoted the designation of the area of Meteora – Antichasia as a protected area
- Strengths/Weaknesses of management:
Cultural: There are still necessities regarding the conservation of the monuments, the wall paintings, and the reliquary treasures. The elaboration of a management plan will most likely contribute to dealing with these necessities.
Natural: It is necessary to strengthen the institutional framework for the protection and management of the natural environment of the area

Future actions:

- Cultural: The elaboration of restoration and rehabilitation studies for specific parts of the monuments, and of conservation studies for wall paintings, relics, incunabula
- Natural: The establishment of a management body, on the basis of the Law 2742/99 and of a Management Plan for the area is being scheduled