

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Ohrid Region with its Cultural and Historical Aspect and its Natural Environment

Brief Description

Situated on the shores of Lake Ohrid, the town of Ohrid is one of the oldest human settlements in Europe. Built mainly between the 7th and 19th centuries, it has the oldest Slav monastery (St Pantelejmon) and more than 800 Byzantine-style icons dating from the 11th to the end of the 14th century. After those of the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, this is considered to be the most important collection of icons in the world.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription 1979, 1980

Agency responsible for site management

- City of Ohrid, Administration
Dimitar Vlahov 57
96 000 Ohrid
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Website: <http://www.ohrid.com.mk/>

2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria N (iii) C (i) (iii) (iv)

Justification as provided by the State Party

Lake Ohrid is a distinctive feature in the region as, like other ancient lakes, it has been populated with elements from the tertiary era from the very outset. Due to its geographical isolation and its uninterrupted biological activity, remnants of this ancient world have been preserved in the waters of the lake in the form of living fossils from the tertiary system.

These vestiges belong to a category of species with links in other parts of the world, as well as to a category of species that are isolated, yet have a certain affinity with types of fossils. It must be stressed that certain species have a primitive structure, which suggests their particularly remote ancestry.

Another category is even more interesting as it does not have any links with recent species, but only with certain fossil remains. This group includes the endemic sponge, *Ochrida spongia rotunda*. It has been compared to the endemic species, *Cortispongilla barroisi*, found in Lake Tiberias in Palestine, and to the *Lubomirskaja* and *Baikalospongia* species in Lake Baikal. It has been proved that there is not link between them and that all these species in the world today are unique and isolated.

The most numerous and, of course, the most notable are the species of snails. Among the 60 species discovered, between 53 (88%) are endemic. Favourable geographical and hydrological conditions have meant that Lake Ohrid has retained its ancient species of animal life, the *Prozobranhiata* and the *Pulmonata*.

Besides vestiges of early animal life, the lake also contains remnant species of plant life. Most of them belong to the *Diatomese* group. The most remarkable examples of ancient flora, found also in the form of pre-Quaternary fossils in the strata of the southern Carpathian Mountains, are: *Gomphonema transsilvanicum*, *Navicula placentula* var. *maculata* and *N. subvasta*. Stereotyped forms have also been found which, with the fossils from the southern Carpathian Mountains, fill the phylogenetic gap between the sub-families of the *Surirelloideae* and the *Campylodiscoideae*. It is a known fact that, there are very large number of species and sub-species in the lake which point to the existence of intralacustrine species. There are species which constitute complete chains in the phylogeny of particular groups.

These were unquestionably formed within the lake itself through divergent evolutionary patterns, due to the factor of ecological isolation; this gives the lake particular significance in universal terms and as regards the remarkable nature of its specific features. It must also be stressed that instances of intralacustrine species are also found in the higher categories, e.g., the celebrated Ohrid trout, *Salmo letnica* Kar. There are three different races within this species. It is thought that this variety in populations came about through seasonal reproductive isolation.

These examples amply demonstrate the great age and specific nature of the organisms in Lake Ohrid, whose origins go back to the Tertiary era. The links which exist to varying degrees between the endemic species of Lake Ohrid and fossils from the Tertiary era rightfully suggest that the animal and plant life here can be considered to be the last vestiges of the ancient aquatic region of the Eurasian continent before the ice age.

The exceptional nature of the living species in the lake and their scientific interest are enhanced by the natural environment along the shores of the lake itself and in the surrounding area. Apart from the striking local geomorphologic formations (Trpeica-Gradiste and Kaliste-Radoza), the Ohrid region also encompasses part of the Galicica National Park, where, over a short stretch of shore and at an altitude of 1000 metres, the floristic composition is extremely varied, including species from the Alpine Mediterranean areas, with some major examples.

On the shores of the lake, remnants of marshy vegetation of glacial origin have been preserved, a unique example in the Balkan Peninsula.

In the cracks in the limestone cliffs and the rocks which overhang the waters of the lake, examples have been preserved from the Tertiary era, such as *Centaurea siskae*, *Nepeta ernesti mayeri*, etc.

The specific features of Lake Ohrid and its wild life are the subject of permanent scientific research work. This particular environment constitutes a natural laboratory which is quite unique of its kind, possessing resources on which research has drawn and will continue to draw, thereby enriching scientific knowledge for the whole of mankind.

The shores of Lake Ohrid and the wider area of this fertile basin were peopled from the Neolithic age onwards, as illustrated by the numerous archaeological sites, whose discoveries clearly indicate the development of the culture of Neolithic man. In later periods of the prehistoric age, man exploited the resources of the lake and the plant and animal life of this fertile area and left material evidence of his civilization, bearing witness to the rapid progress of the spiritual development of the populations in the Ohrid region. The Via Egnacia was to contribute to the development of communications with neighbouring regions and, more especially, in the establishment of links with remote towns in the Balkans and with southern Europe.

This region was subsequently conquered by the Illyrians, the Greeks, the Romans and the Byzantines, before the Slavonic tribes eventually settled here.

It was not by chance that from the very beginning of the Christian era, Christianity was to spread rapidly and effectively and that Ohrid, (Lychnidos as it was called), was to become an archbishopric and grow into a major ecclesiastical centre for this part of the Balkans.

The most important period, undoubtedly, in the spiritual and cultural development of this region

was when Clement of Ohrid and Naum, disciples of the spiritual leaders, Cyril and Methodius settled here. Their students numbered some three thousand five hundred and this teaching activity constituted the greatest contribution to the growth of culture among the Slav nations during the 9th and 10th centuries. The enlightening influences of Clement of Ohrid laid enduring foundations which, for several centuries, served as the basis for the overall development of, not only the Slavs of Macedonia, but of other Slav peoples too.

The establishment of the first Macedonian Slavic State under the rule of the Emperor Samoilo was to give a cultural emphasis to the period of subsequent development. In those wild and warlike times, talented architects erected immense basilicas which were to serve as models for centuries. The archbishopric of Ohrid, whose jurisdiction extended over a wide part of the Balkans, encouraged the building of edifices whose dimensions, form and decoration ranked with the churches of Constantinople and Salonika. The churches of St. Sophia (11th century), of Our Lady of Perivleptos and St. John Kaneo, among others, display a high level of artistic attainment in their frescoes and theological representations, executed by local as well as foreign artists. The development of ecclesiastical life along the shores of the lake, with its own religious architecture, frescoes and icons, testifies to the significance of this religious and cultural centre over the centuries.

With the Turkish invasion, the national cultural life continued but in a restrained way. However, the basic continuity endured despite the extremely difficult and unfavourable circumstances. Literary activity came to rest in the hands of the monks, who ensured its further development by using transcriptions of literary works for extending learning and culture.

Developing within the compass of the walls of the ancient fortress, the city of Ohrid found ingenious solutions to the architectural problems of public buildings and private houses, which retained the essence of their traditional styles. The renaissance period left a distinct mark on the fabric of the city, lending it a new architectural style which has been preserved until the present day. The cities of Ohrid and Struga, which grew up on the shores of the "White Lake", are still, then, vital examples of the cultural development of antiquity, Byzantium and, above all, of the Slavs, with their admirably preserved heritage deriving from the spiritual culture of the fascinating environment of the ancient lake - a museum of living fossils open to all our fellow-men.

As provided in IUCN/ICOMOS evaluation

IUCN EVALUATION (May 1979): The submission does not put forward a rationale for the nomination vis-à-vis its natural qualities. The existence of "L'Institute hydro-biologie" since 1935 has led to a very detailed bibliography on the aquatic and associated organisms of the lake, some of which are unique.

The boundaries proposed for the site do not appear from a natural sciences perspective to meet the criteria of integrity, i.e. "the area should be of sufficient size and contain the necessary habitat requirements for the survival of the species". From this aspect, the watershed should be included.

IUCN has not evaluated the cultural content of the submission and there are undoubtedly close links between these and the natural environment.

The lack of additional documentation and the late arrival of the submission prevent a comprehensive evaluation of the natural values of the area for its World Heritage Listing.

RECOMMENDATION:

Any decision to place on the World Heritage List should be based on cultural values. Current data does not warrant listing on the basis of natural values.

ICOMOS EVALUATION (1980): The City of Ohrid is one of the eldest human establishments not only of Macedonia and the Balkans, but also of Europe. It contains some of the most ancient Neolithic archaeological sites, and others from the Bronze Age and the Hellenistic period; it also has houses and churches from the 7th to the 19th century, including the most ancient Slavonic monastery dedicated to St. Panteleimon.

Its churches exhibit more than 2.500 m² of frescoes and famous icons of worldwide fame.

The town's architecture represents, with its old typical streets and houses and its particular atmosphere around old squares, the best preserved and most complete ensemble of ancient urban architecture of this part of Europe. Writing, education and Slavonic culture spread from Ohrid. It is a cultural cent of great importance for history not only of this part of the Balkan Peninsula, but also for all nations of Slavonic tongue and literature and for world history and literature.

Furthermore, this city and its historico-cultural region are located in a natural setting of exceptional beauty already included in the World Heritage List in 1979.

Inclusion of this cultural property to the World Heritage List is recommended under criteria (i), (iii) and (iv) of the Convention.

Committee Decision

Bureau (May 1979):

For the following sites, the Bureau considered either

- (i) that the documentation was inadequate; or
- (ii) that a sufficiently persuasive case had not been made.

It was recommended to the Committee that consideration be deferred.

Specific questions on certain properties would be formulated to be addressed to the State concerned. Notes on these follow the Table.

The nominations for any of these properties could be considered at a Bureau meeting immediately preceding the third session of the World Heritage Committee, if documentation were received in time for adequate processing by the Secretariat, ICOMOS and IUCN.

IUCN was of the opinion that as the natural features were concerned; the site could not be recommended for inscription on the World Heritage List because it did not possess the necessary integrity, since only half of the lake and a small part of the basin are in Yugoslav territory. ICOMOS, on its side, felt that the cultural elements in the proposal should be examined more thoroughly before a recommendation on their universal value could be formulated. Given these viewpoints, the Bureau decided to defer its decision to enable ICOMOS to complete its study of the proposal.

Bureau (October 1979): - n° 99 - Ohrid, recommended for its natural characteristics (Yugoslavia)

(The Bureau furthermore recommended that the site be considered for its cultural features at a later stage when precise details on the delimitation of the site were available.)

Committee (1979): The Committee decided to inscribe this site on the List in view of the assurances received concerning the integrity of the Lake as a whole.

Bureau (1980): The Bureau recommended that the site included on the List by the Committee at its 3rd session (the part of Lake Ohrid which is situated in Yugoslavia) be extended to cover the cultural and historical area of the Ohrid region.

Committee 1980: 13. The Committee also decided to extend the protected site of Ohrid Lake to include the cultural and historical area. This site will carry the name "Ohrid region with its cultural and historical aspects and its natural environment".

Status of Statement of Significance:

- Statement of significance adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site, however there are partial changes to the urban and architectural characteristics at the urban core of the site.
- Additional change proposed by State Party: a name change to "Ohrid Region's Natural and Cultural Heritage". Changes to the existing statement of significance may need to be discussed

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: inadequate. Since inscription there have been some destructions of the site, requiring a redefinition of the boundaries and possible reduction of the protected area
- Buffer zone: because the redefinition of the boundaries would affect the buffer zone, this will have to be changed as well
- Change to buffer zone proposed by State Party: legislation for protection of Ohrid will be set in place during the course of this reporting cycle (November-December 2005) that will set the boundaries and the buffer zone of the protected area

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have not been completely maintained. There are some weaknesses in the implementation of the urban planning regulations and plans which are reflected in the deviation in the size, height, use of material and look of the facades of some buildings. As well, future development pressures and tourism industry pressures are expected to affect the site

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- At present, no special legislation or administrative arrangements exist for this site. However, it is hoped that new laws will come into effect to ensure protection for the site
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Mixed use, including paid visitor attraction, urban centre, national park, religious use, and rural landscape

Management /Administrative Body

- Steering group: does not exist at present, but setting one up is an acknowledged priority
- There is no site manager or coordinator, but the need for one is recognised
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national, local
- The current management system is not considered effective

Proposed actions:

- There is an urgent need for a management plan for the site

5. Management Plan

- No management plan is being implemented
- Completion and adoption of the plan is scheduled to commence: mid-2006
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Headed by Minister of Environment, with the Ministry of Culture, Office for Protection of the Cultural Heritage, Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, Special Professional Body for the Ohrid region, UNESCO National Commission

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- State Budget: unable to provide budget information due to the lack of a management plan and tracking system for this sort of information. Conservation and protection funding comes from the annual budget of the national government
- Funds have previously been accessed through the World Bank
- Funds are considered insufficient, which is currently addressed by extra funds from local, national and international sources

7. Staffing Levels

- number of staff: not given

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

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

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

- Scientific institutions, museum conservation, training on site management, etc.: specifics are not given, except to mention that facilities in this area are very modest

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 97,757 in 2001. Approximately 11.5% are foreign visitors
- Trend: with evident increase since 2001
- Visitor facilities: published guides, information material, tourist trails, museums within the site
- Visitor needs: public washrooms, refreshment areas, handicapped access to the monuments

10. Scientific Studies

- No details given

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- There is an inadequate number of signs referring to World Heritage site.
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors and local authorities. Inadequate awareness in the local community and local businesses
- Need for raising awareness: implementation of activities mentioned above at all levels. There are plans to develop an education component of the site's plans
- Previous events: ECO-Fest, an International Television Festival; promotion of a post stamp that marked the 25th Anniversary of the inscription of Ohrid in the World Heritage list; Lake Ohrid day June 21
- Web site available, managed by Department of Tourism at local government level
- Local participation projects include: Heritage Trails-financed by the Phare Partnership Program; Natural and Cultural Treasure of Ohrid and Prespa Lakes-financed by GTZ (German Society for Technical Cooperation); Workshops and pilot-projects within the Lake

Ohrid Conservation Project-financed by the World Bank

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- World Heritage Bureau sessions: 22nd (1998)
- World Heritage Committee sessions: 22nd (1998)

Conservation interventions

- Conservation; restoration works; preventive protection; setting up of museums on site in rehabilitated historic buildings
- Present state of conservation: adequate

Threats and Risks to site

- Development pressures, overcrowding of inhabitants, environmental pressures, prone to natural disasters (type of disaster not given)
- Development pressures and the possible overcrowding of inhabitants can be directly attributed to World Heritage status
- Emergency measures taken: passing of "Lex Specialis" for the site

13. Monitoring

- No formal monitoring programme
- Measures taken/planned: Lake Ohrid Conservation Project, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning established an Office in Ohrid (PIU). The year's monitoring activities were conducted by the Hydrometeorological Institution's specialists on Lake Ohrid and rivers that flow into the Lake, and were arranged by the Watershed Management Committee
- Future indicators to consider: key indicators for monitoring how the outstanding universal value of the site are being sustained should be a priority task of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, social, economic and management aspects. There is increased awareness and care on local and national level about the site; increased funding of conservation projects in the site; increased interest for tourist visits of the site; bilateral agreement signed between Macedonia and Albania on protection of the Lake watershed heritage

- Weaknesses of management: lack of working space, equipment, staff and resources; lack of bilateral and multilateral agreements; insufficient promotional and educational materials about the World Heritage site; lack of educational programs on all levels; lack of visitor's facilities; lack of funding overall

Future actions

- Preparation of National Strategy and Action Plan for Heritage Site Protection. Awareness-raising on local and national level for the values of the natural and cultural heritage; full harmonisation of the legislative from the field of protection of the natural and cultural heritage with the internationally adopted standards; organisation of short courses, seminars and workshops on national and international level for training of the existing staff and young specialists; fundraising; including the Albanian part of Lake Ohrid in the World Heritage List; twinning with World Heritage sites from the neighbouring countries; raising of the awareness of the young people for the World Heritage site; preparation and production of information and presentation materials about the World Heritage site