

**IDENTIFICATION**

- Nomination** : Myr Castle
- Location** : Grodno Region
- State Party** : Belarus
- Date** : 1 October 1991

**DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY**

The nomination relates to the Castle of Myr, located to the SW of Minsk. It was built at the end of the 15th or early 16th century (first documentary record 1531) by the Ilyinichi family, and taken over by the Radziwill family about a century later.

The castle is an irregular quadrilateral in plan, with corner towers and an external gate tower. In its early form it consisted principally of the walls and corner towers, but new palace buildings, with Renaissance features designed by the Italian architect Gian Maria Bernardoni, and an Italian-style garden, were added by the Radziwills. Ramparts were also constructed, which rendered the existing walls obsolete.

Restoration after sieges in 1655 and 1706 resulted in the introduction of Baroque features. After severe damage during the Napoleonic wars in 1794 and 1812 the castle was abandoned, and not restored again until the 1920s, when some Secession-style elements were added. During World War II it served as a prisoner-of-war camp and as a ghetto.

The present phase of restoration and reconstruction began in 1982. Work on the SW and Gate Towers is nearly completed and restoration of the lost ceilings in the north wing of the palace has begun. It is intended to restore the entire complex, along with the historic centre of the town of Myr, as a centre for cultural tourism.

**AUTHENTICITY**

There can be little dispute over the authenticity of the castle. The 19th century owners had intended at one time that the remains surviving the Napoleonic war destruction should be left as a romantic ruin and so the castle escaped the ruthless reconstruction that characterizes much 19th century restoration. The work in the 1920s was on a relatively small scale and the current programme appears to be sensitive and to respect the authenticity of the complex, although its extent is considerable.

## **MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION**

The site is owned and administered by the State Arts Museum of the Republic of Byelorussia and is registered on the State List of Monuments of Town Planning and Architecture. The site itself, including the ramparts, covers 18,750 sq m, but this is enclosed in a wider protected area, which includes the park, of 27 ha.

## **EVALUATION**

### **Qualities**

This castle is of a type that is not uncommon in this area of central Europe. Its special qualities lie principally in its setting and its harmonious design, enhanced by the subtle colour derived from its blend of materials (brick and stone). It also illustrates the development of castle form in the region from the late 15th century onwards, incorporating and blending elements of Renaissance and Baroque with the Late Gothic original.

### **Comparison with other sites**

The castle of Myr is a good example of a type of castle that is common in this area of central Europe, dating from the period of Polish / Lithuanian dominance in the 16th and 17th centuries. It is, however, not of such a quality or sufficiently representative to justify inclusion on the World Heritage List.

### **Additional comments**

ICOMOS is also concerned about the extent of the reconstruction work currently in progress.

Three members of the ICOMOS Bureau had visited the castle.

## **ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION**

Not recommended for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

ICOMOS, October 1992

## Mir Castle (Belarus)

No 625

### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Mir Castle (The Radzivils Castle)
<i>Location</i>	Grodno Region, Korelichi District
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Belarus
<i>Date</i>	1 October 1991

### Justification by State Party

The subtly nuanced plastic composition of the Mir Castle, carried out with due consideration for the environment, its dimensions, artistic design, and colours, as well as the harmonious combination of the original design and later developments allow the Mir Castle to be considered a unique masterpiece and an outstanding creation of many generations.

The same factors, together with the originality of the fortifications design, make it a remarkable specimen of a late medieval fortified feudal residence, at least for the Slav territories and the Baltic region.

The original elements of the Castle reflect some characteristics of the late Belorussian Gothic, which developed on the basis of popular arts during the Renaissance period in eastern Europe and was influenced by both the locally prevailing Orthodox faith and, latently, some pagan traditions. Each of these factors contributed to shaping the special characteristics of the Belorussian Gothic, which show in the proportions and dimensions of the construction, adjusted to man and the environment, in the refinement of decoration of the Castle's various elements depending on their functions and significance (which reflects some pagan ideas about the magic of symbols), and in the use in façade decoration of an original combination of light-and-shade effects with confrontation of the textures of various materials and the use of toned colours. These architectural and artistic features make the Castle a unique defence construction of its kind. This original trend in architecture was later supplanted by western schools, whose influence grew with the expansion of Roman Catholicism. In the Mir Castle some later developments according to the principles of the Italian Renaissance were, nevertheless, adapted to the original design with the use of local artistic methods and traditions.

On the other hand, the Mir Castle had undergone hardly any stylization or imitative reconstruction. All the extraneous features are clearly authentic. The project currently under way envisages preservation, conservation, selective scientifically based restoration of various original elements

and later developments, and opening the site for visitors.

**Criteria i, iii, and iv**

### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *monument*.

### History and Description

#### *History*

The castle was built in the late 15th or early 16th century (the first reference to it dates from 1531) by the Ilyinichi family. The initial work consisted of building the walls and towers, but work came to an end for some unknown reason. Building had been completed by the beginning of the 17th century with the addition of palatial accommodation, with some Renaissance features (including an Italian-style garden), after it had passed to the Radzivil family in 1569. This work was probably supervised by the Italian architect Gian Maria Bernardoni.

Following sieges in 1655 and 1706 reconstruction work involved the addition of some Baroque features. It was badly damaged during the Napoleonic period, in 1794 and again in 1812, and it remained in a state of ruinous abandon until the 1920s some restoration work took place, as a result of which some Secession elements were added. During World War II it served as a prison camp and a ghetto. Restoration did not start in earnest again until 1982.

#### *Description*

The Mir Castle is situated on the bank of a small lake at the confluence of the river Mirianka and a small tributary.

Its fortified walls form an irregular quadrilateral; there are four exterior corner towers with hipped roofs rising to five storeys and a six-storey external gate tower on the western side. All the towers have basements with vaulted ceilings; the basements and lower storeys are four-sided and the upper storeys octagonal. The upper storeys originally had wooden ceilings, but these were later replaced by brick vaulting.

The facades are in brick, with recessed plasterwork. Stone elements were added in the later 16th century. The window and door frames and the balconies are made of sandstone. The roofs are tiled, some of the tiling being glazed.

Some traces of the original ramparts survive to the west, north, and east. The total area of the Castle, as nominated for inscription, is 18,750m<sup>2</sup>, and the entire complex, including the castle and its park, covers 27ha.

### Management and Protection

#### *Legal status*

The property is registered on the State List of Monuments of Town Planning and Architecture of the Republic of Belarus.

#### *Management*

The Mir Castle is owned and administered by the State Arts Museum of the Republic of Belarus. It is managed by the Minsk Regional Agency.

**Evaluation**

ICOMOS has commissioned a comparative study, which will be ready shortly. An expert evaluation mission is to be sent to the property as soon as possible.

However, the nomination dossier currently held by ICOMOS was submitted in late 1991. At that time a major restoration project was in progress. ICOMOS wishes to have an up-to-date report on the property, covering current legal status, ownership, management, and conservation history, with appropriate plans, photographs, and slides. At the time this evaluation was prepared for the printer, nothing had been received from the State Party.

**Recommendation**

To await the provision of an updated nomination dossier.

ICOMOS, September 1999

## Mir Castle (Belarus)

No 625

### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Mir Castle Complex
<i>Location</i>	Grodno Region, Karyelichy District
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Belarus
<i>Date</i>	1 October 1991

### Justification by State Party

The unique quality of the Mir castle complex derives from its situation in a fertile region in the geographical centre of Europe, at the cross-roads of the most important north – south and east–west trade routes, and at the same time at the epicentre of crucial European and global military conflicts between neighbouring powers with different religious and cultural traditions.

This short period of history, starting in the late 15th century, was marked by a combination of unprecedented changes:

- in the religious sphere (expulsion of the remaining vestiges of paganism by Christianity, concurrently with the conflict between western and eastern Christianity);
- in the humanitarian sphere (replacement of Gothic absolutism by the humanist ideals of the Renaissance, and the development of national self-identification);
- in the economic sphere (rapid development of science, technology, and handicrafts).

The Mir castle complex is the most outstanding monument created under the influence of this rare combination of factors. Its form illustrates the organic fusion of :

- pagan symbols with Christian religious objects;
- indigenous artistic traditions with those of peoples from distant countries;
- archaic defensive structures and layouts with the most up-to-date ones (including some rare experiments from the transitional period);
- almost contemporary but extremely diverse elements of different styles based on Belarussian Gothic architectural and artistic style (which was very limited in time and space).

At the same time Mir castle is an architectural structure of unique beauty, resulting from its dimensional and plastic

composition combined with delicate nuances (such as the inclusion of curves) and richness and variety of decoration and colour.

The urban layout of the castle complex is almost completely authentic. The plan of the small town of Mir vividly demonstrates the principles of formation of a medieval town as a feudal domain: the two elements, the town and the castle, with the associated economic area, are situated at certain distances from one another. The compactness of the town centre plan is clearly conditioned by the fortifications, now disappeared, although some elements can still be discerned. The architectural scale and the position of the castle, with its visual connections, have survived intact.

The Mir castle complex in its setting vividly symbolizes the history of Belarus and, as such, it is one of the major national symbols of the country. **Criteria i, ii, iv, and v**

### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

### History and Description

#### *History*

The castle was built in the late 15th or early 16th century (the first reference to it dates from 1531) by the Ilyinichi family. The initial work consisted of building the walls and towers in Gothic style, but work came to an end for some unknown reason. Building had been completed by the beginning of the 17th century with the addition of palatial accommodation, with some Renaissance features (including an Italian-style garden and a system of ponds), after it had passed to the Radzivil family in 1569. This work was probably supervised by the Italian architect Gian Maria Bernardoni.

Following sieges in 1655 and 1706 reconstruction work involved the addition of some Baroque features. It was badly damaged during the Napoleonic period, in 1794 and again in 1812, and it remained in a state of ruinous abandon until the late 19th century, when the complex was purchased by the Duke of Svyatopolk-Mirsky, who began laying out a landscape park with a lake. A new palace (destroyed in 1914) and other structures (chapel, watchman's house, etc) were erected within the grounds. The old castle survived as a romantic ruin. Some restoration work was carried out in the 1920s and 1930s, as a result of which some Secession and Romantic elements were added. During World War II it served as a prison camp and a ghetto. Restoration did not start in earnest again until 1982.

#### *Description*

The Mir Castle complex is situated on the bank of a small lake at the confluence of the river Miryanka and a small tributary.

The fortified walls of the *Castle* form an irregular quadrilateral; there are four exterior corner towers with hipped roofs rising to five storeys and a six-storey external gate tower on the western side. All the towers have basements with vaulted ceilings; the basements and lower

storeys are four-sided and the upper storeys octagonal. The upper storeys originally had wooden ceilings, but these were later replaced by brick vaulting.

The facades are in brick, with recessed painted plasterwork. Stone elements were added in the later 16th century. The window and door frames and the balconies are made of sandstone. The roofs are tiled, some of the tiling being glazed. The structure covers 78m by 72m, with an internal courtyard 42m square; it is *c* 17m high. The towers vary in height from 22m to 26m.

Some traces of the original ramparts survive to the west, north, and east. The total area of the Castle, as nominated for inscription, is 18,750m<sup>2</sup>, and the entire complex, including the castle and its park, covers 27ha.

The *chapel-crypt of the Dukes of Svyatopolk-Mirsky* is located to the east of the castle in the landscape garden. It is a single-aisled brick chapel with a crypt and belfry adjoining the main facade asymmetrically. The facade is decorated with a mosaic panel depicting the image of Christ, made of multicoloured (including gilded) tesserae. The chapel-crypt is roofed with galvanized metal. The decoration of the facade is based on a combination of red brick facing and unpainted plasterwork.

The *watchman's house* is situated close to the north of the chapel-crypt. It is a single-storey brick building with a span roof and no cellar. Its facade decoration is similar to that of the chapel-crypt. It is currently being restored with the aim of locating the technical services of the castle complex there.

The *palace annex* built in the late 19th century is located at the eastern outskirts of the complex in the landscape park area. It is a two-storey brick building, rectangular in plan with a hipped roof. The facades are stuccoed and decorated. At present the building is used as living quarters. The *ruins of the main palace building* are situated at the eastern outskirts of the complex, to the north of the palace annex and are not currently in use.

The *small 19th century chapel* is a tiny stone stuccoed building, square in plan with a metallic roof of complicated shape, situated at the western outskirts of the complex. The chapel has one room with entrance door and two windows. It is not in use now.

The *Memorial on the site of the massacre of the Mir ghetto prisoners* lies in the northern part of the complex, to the east of the former Italian garden. It consists of a stele erected in the 1950s and an architectural composition from 1998 to the designs of the Israeli artist Zvi Rashev. The exact site of the massacre is outlined by cobblestones.

## Management and Protection

### Legal status

The property is registered on the State List of Historic and Cultural Properties of the Republic of Belarus.

### Management

The Mir Castle has been owned and administered by the National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus since 1987, which is responsible for its maintenance and management.

There are currently 22 professionals working at Mir, backed up by 41 technical and 15 service staff.

Overall supervision is exercised by the State Inspectorate on Historical and Cultural Heritage Protection of the Republic of Belarus.

The current management and restoration plan, just finalized, provides for the completion of the extensive programme of restoration and conservation and the development of the property as a museum, with facilities for conferences, meetings, festivals, concerts, theatrical performances, etc. This is an international centre, the result of Memoranda of Cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and UNESCO in 1991 and 1998. The restoration programme is designed by the planning group of the Soyztchservice enterprise, on the basis of the report of UNESCO expert and former ICOMOS Secretary General Helmut Stelzer in 1991.

## Conservation and Authenticity

### Conservation history

The restoration of the castle complex did not begin until 1982. However, it was not until 1991, after the report of the UNESCO expert had been studied, that the current major restoration and conservation project was put in hand. This has continued up to the present, though with some breaks owing to shortages of funding, and work has been completed on most of the major elements of the complex.

### Authenticity

The overall authenticity of the complex is high: it has preserved its original layout virtually intact since the 17th century.

All the stone elements of the Gothic and Renaissance structures have survived well and are completely authentic. However, most of the wooden components had disappeared, owing to climatic degradation and fire.

The restoration work has involved the use of traditional craft techniques and appropriate replacement materials. The work has resulted in fragments of original Gothic elements, such as wall paintings and colouring, coming to light, and these have been preserved wherever possible *in situ*.

## Evaluation

### Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Mir in June 2000.

### Qualities

Mir Castle grew and developed over several centuries, and in its present form it reflects the evolution of military architecture over a significant period of history.

### Comparative analysis

Mir Castle is acknowledged to be one of the finest examples of a Renaissance/Baroque central European castle.

## **Recommendation**

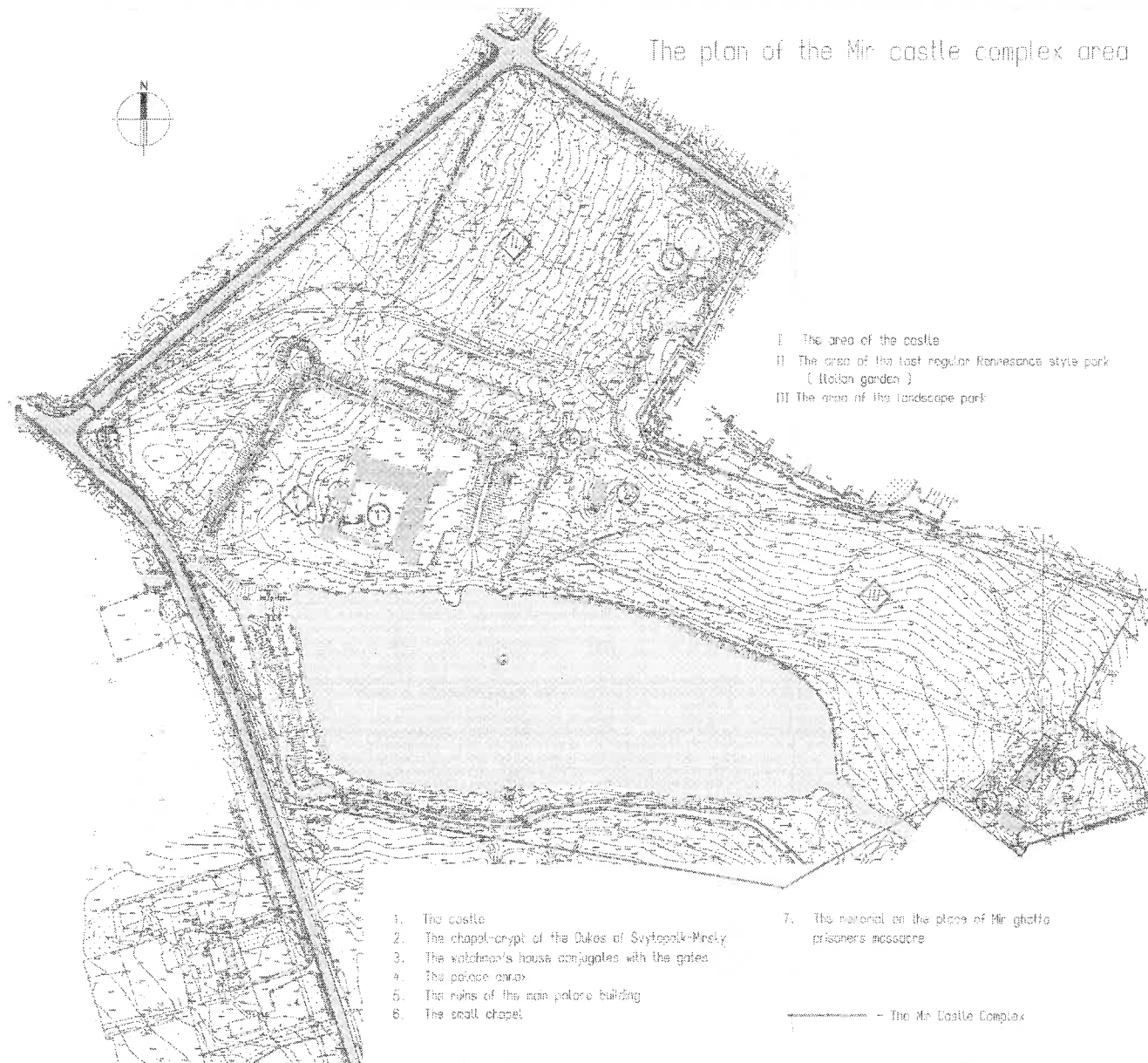
That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii and iv*:

*Criterion ii* Mir Castle is an exceptional example of a central European castle, reflecting in its design and layout successive cultural influences (Gothic, Baroque, and Renaissance) that blend harmoniously to create an impressive monument to the history of this region.

*Criterion iv* The region in which Mir Castle stands has a long history of political and cultural confrontation and coalescence, which is graphically represented in the form and appearance of the ensemble.

ICOMOS, September 2000

Plan de l'ensemble du Château de Mir / Plan of Mir Castle Complex







Vue d'ensemble / General view



Chapelle-crypte des ducs de Svyatopolk-Mirsky / Chapel-crypt of the Dukes of Svyatopolk-Mirsky



Façade ouest et tour d'entrée / Western facade and gate tower