
Ancient City of Nessebar (Bulgaria) No 217bis

1 Basic information

State Party

Bulgaria

Name of property

Ancient City of Nessebar

Location

Burgas Province

Inscription

1983

Brief description

Situated on a rocky peninsula on the Black Sea, the more than 3,000-year-old site of Nessebar was originally a Thracian settlement (Menebria). At the beginning of the 6th century BC, the city became a Greek colony. The city's remains, which date mostly from the Hellenistic period, include the acropolis, a temple of Apollo, an agora and a wall from the Thracian fortifications. Among other monuments, the Stara Mitropolia Basilica and the fortress date from the Middle Ages, when this was one of the most important Byzantine towns on the west coast of the Black Sea. Wooden houses built in the 19th century are typical of the Black Sea architecture of the period.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

10 March 2023

2 Issues raised

Background

The Ancient City of Nessebar was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1983 on the basis of criteria (iii) and (iv).

In 2008, the State Party clarified the boundaries and confirmed the size of the property at 27.1 ha and of the buffer zone at 1245.6 ha (Decision 32 COM 8D). The latter includes a maritime belt in the Black Sea around the peninsula to protect underwater archaeological vestiges of the Ancient City of Nessebar.

The submerged archaeological sites were first investigated between 1960 and 1984. In the 1980s and 1990s, some of them, identified along the northern and north-western shore of the peninsula, were covered as a result of structural works of reinforcement of the coastline. Underwater archaeological works were

undertaken again in 2015, in response to the Municipality's project to expand the Severna Buna Fishing Port in the north-western part of the peninsula. The Bulgarian Centre for Underwater Archaeology carried out a geophysical survey campaign, which suggested the presence of buried structures. In 2017, a new program dedicated to underwater archaeological sites of the Ancient City of Nessebar was launched by the Centre for Underwater Archaeology with the aim of drawing up a status report on the submerged structures, documenting them and undertaking photogrammetric recording.

In 2010, a retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value was adopted for the Ancient City of Nessebar (Decision 34 COM 8E).

The same year, a joint WHC-ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission visited the property. It indicated that continued absence of an adequate management and protection framework for the Ancient City of Nessebar, including a conservation master plan that would address both the archaeological remains in the city and underwater, could present threats to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

In 2012, the ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission further informed that, while the State Party already recognised in the nomination dossier the existence and importance of the underwater archaeological vestiges, no activities related to this heritage had been undertaken since the inscription of the property. The mission recommended developing a project proposal for underwater area protection within the framework of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001).

In 2015, the ICOMOS advisory mission that visited the Ancient City of Nessebar recommended that the boundaries of the World Heritage property be extended to include the underwater remains of the previous layouts and structures of the ancient town.

In 2017, a WHC-ICOMOS advisory mission to the property took place, joined by the UNESCO Scientific and Technical Advisory Body (STAB) to the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage. The mission evaluated the underwater archaeological structures located in the buffer zone and recommended that a minor boundary modification be proposed to include this heritage within the boundary of the property. The mission further assessed the ongoing developments at the surrounding sea coastline and port development projects, which had potential to endanger the preservation of underwater archaeological remains, and recommended considering underwater cultural heritage values in the heritage impact assessment of any development projects proposed on the sea coastline.

In 2018, a joint WHC-ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission visited the property. It urged the State Party to undertake systematic archaeological investigations of

the submerged remains and reiterated the recommendation of the 2017 advisory mission for the State Party to consider proposing a minor boundary modification to include the underwater structures within the boundary of the property. The mission also considered that the improvement of port facilities and the increase in maritime traffic around the peninsula were potential factors of degradation or destruction of the underwater vestiges, and indicated that no intervention on the seabed that may affect the archaeological sites should be undertaken and navigation controlled. The mission recommended that the State Party should seek in the long-term to relocate the Nessebar Port Terminal and the Marina Nessebar facilities outside of the peninsula.

In 2019, the World Heritage Committee urged the State Party to continue to undertake research in anticipation of a future minor boundary modification to include all underwater archaeological remains of the ancient town (Decision 43 COM 7B.81).

In 2021, the World Heritage Committee again requested the State Party to finalise promptly the research necessary for a future minor boundary modification request (Decision 44 COM 7B.154).

Modification

The requested modification proposes an extension of the area of the property by 7.61 ha by adding three polygonal sections of the aquatic part of the buffer zone, anchored to the littoral to the northwest, southeast, and south of the peninsula. The size of the property will increase to 34.71 ha, while the area of the buffer zone will be reduced to 1237.99 ha after the modification. The State Party has submitted maps with the new perimeter, which now runs partly at sea, and provided coordinates of the angles of the three added sections.

The northwest section includes submerged remnants of a linear stone structure, and walls of a Byzantine fortress from the 6th century built in *opus mixtum*, which correspond with archaeological vestiges found on the ground at the western end of the peninsula.

The southeast section includes archaeological remains of different structures: a wall of an early Byzantine fortress built in *opus mixtum*, a wall of a fortress with a tower probably from the Late Classical or Hellenistic period, another wall and a tower of a fortress from the end of the Classical or Hellenistic period, a fortress wall made of large blocks likely dating to the Late Classical or Hellenistic period, a semi-circular wall that may be associated with the first fortification system of Messambria (also known as Menebria), and two breakwaters – one L-shaped and the other linear – from Late Antiquity or later. These remains have been partly disturbed as a result of the construction of a pier in this part of the peninsula.

The south section encompasses submerged vestiges of an antique street that run along the contemporary shoreline.

The proposed additions to the area of the property are said to be an integral part of the Ancient City of Nessebar. The underwater archaeological vestiges testify to the changes in the sea coastline and the different outlines of the city at different periods, thus contributing to the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

The proposed modification will not carry implications for the current management measures and protection mechanisms applicable to the land area of the property, which is regulated by virtue of Cultural Heritage Law (Official Gazette No. 19 of 2009), Ordinance No. 8 of the Culture Committee and the Committee on Architecture and Public Works of the Architectural-Historical Reserves Sozopol and Nessebar /SG 9/1981, as well as the Spatial Planning Act (Official Gazette No 1 of 2001 with amendments). At the municipal level, it is regulated by the Construction and Regulatory Plan of the Ancient City of Nessebar from 1981 and the preliminary Construction and Regulatory Plan adopted in 1991.

The aquatic sections that are proposed as extensions to the property are managed as underwater archaeological research territory through the Cultural Heritage Law. New constructions within these areas are prohibited, with the exception of infrastructure that serves protection of the immovable underwater cultural heritage or is used to provide the necessary minimum access to these sites; the latter regulated through Ordinance No. H-7 of 12.06.2008. Maintenance and cleaning as well as tourism development are under control of the Centre for Underwater Archaeology in coordination with the Ministry of Environment and Water. Activities allowed within the three aquatic sections are regulated through the protection regime adopted by the State Party in 2015 for the buffer zone of the property (Minister of Culture Order No. RD 9R-14 of 06.05.2015 /SG No. 51 of 2015). They require pre-approval of the Ministry of Culture in communication with the Centre for Underwater Archaeology and the National Institute for Immovable Cultural Heritage, and must be carried out under archaeological supervision.

The Conservation and Management Plan for the property, which is to be developed within six months, will include specific conservation measures for the underwater vestiges as attributes of the Outstanding Universal Value.

ICOMOS considers that the proposed minor modification of the boundary of the property is appropriate. It will contribute to the Outstanding Universal Value and strengthen the integrity of the Ancient City of Nessebar.

However, ICOMOS considers that while the boundary of the property as shown on the provided maps corresponds to the original boundary approved by the

World Heritage Committee in 2008, aside for the now proposed aquatic additions, the boundary of the buffer zone differs from the originally approved one. The difference relates to the mainland area of Nessebar, which constitutes the western end of the buffer zone.

Indeed, ICOMOS and WHC missions that visited the property in 2012, 2015, 2017 and 2018 indicated the need for a revision of the buffer zone on the mainland in order to protect the area of the necropolis located in this part of Nessebar, and to maintain a green area which constitutes a section of the coastline visible from the peninsula. However, a formal request for the modification of the boundary of the buffer zone has not been thus far submitted by the State Party.

- g) Not undertaking any intervention on the seabed that may affect underwater archaeological vestiges and controlling navigation around the peninsula,
- h) Considering, in the long-term, relocation of the Nessebar Port Terminal and the Marina Nessebar facilities outside of the peninsula;

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party submit a revised map at the appropriate scale, showing the boundary of the property as approved following this minor boundary modification request, and the buffer zone as clarified in 2008.

3 Recommendations

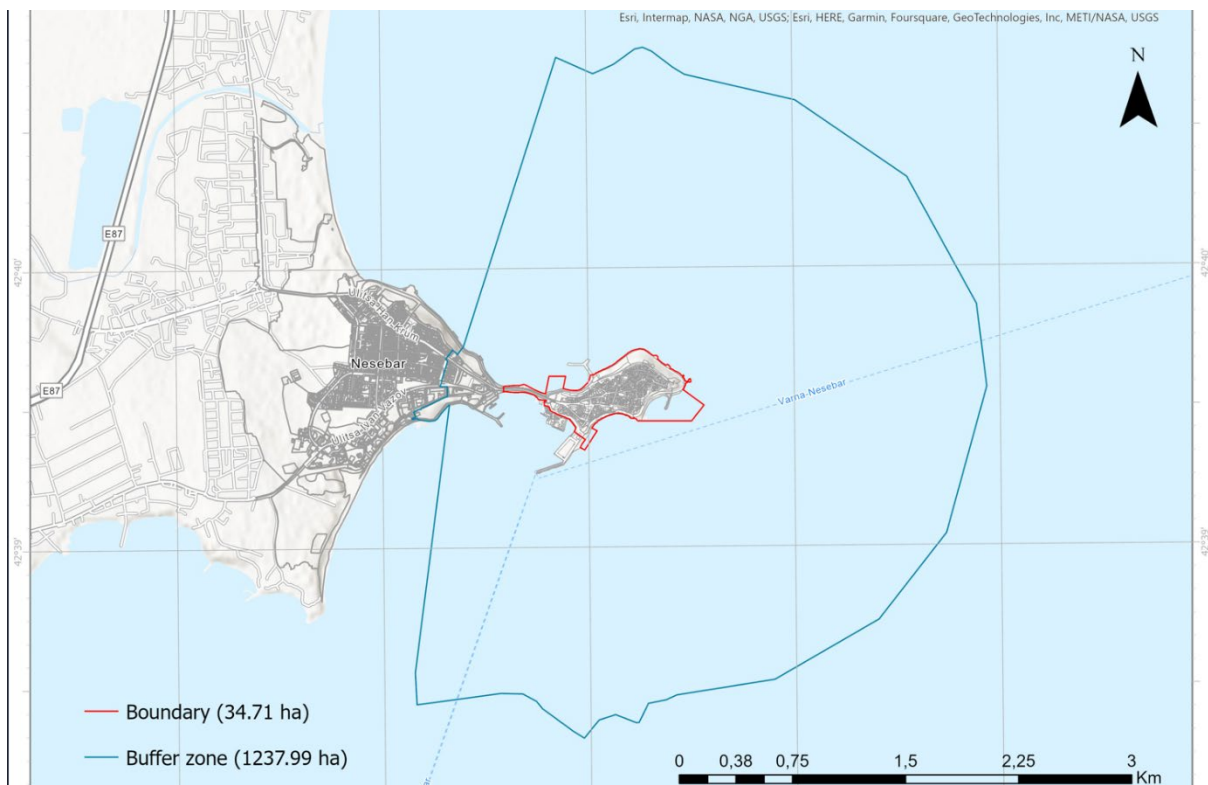
Recommendation with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the proposed minor modification to the boundary of the Ancient City of Nessebar, Bulgaria, be **approved**.

Additional recommendations

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- a) Formally proposing a minor boundary modification for the buffer zone of the property, in response to the recommendations provided by ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre in 2012, 2015, 2017 and 2018,
- b) Completing the Conservation and Management Plan for the Ancient City of Nessebar, and considering the underwater archaeological vestiges in all areas of management and planning by making provisions for specific regimes for conservation, management, sustainable development, and monitoring of this heritage,
- c) Reinforcing and expanding the research programme for the underwater cultural heritage of the Ancient City of Nessebar as an integral part of developing the national inventory,
- d) Considering underwater cultural heritage values as part of heritage impact assessment of any new development along the coastline,
- e) Launching a feasibility study on the underwater archaeological sites to explore how to make them accessible to the public through maritime archaeological routes and pursuing other interpretation initiatives,
- f) Establishing a capacity-building programme in cooperation with UNESCO and its partners to improve the identification, evaluation, research and protection of underwater cultural heritage,



Map showing the revised boundaries of the property and of the buffer zone (February 2023)