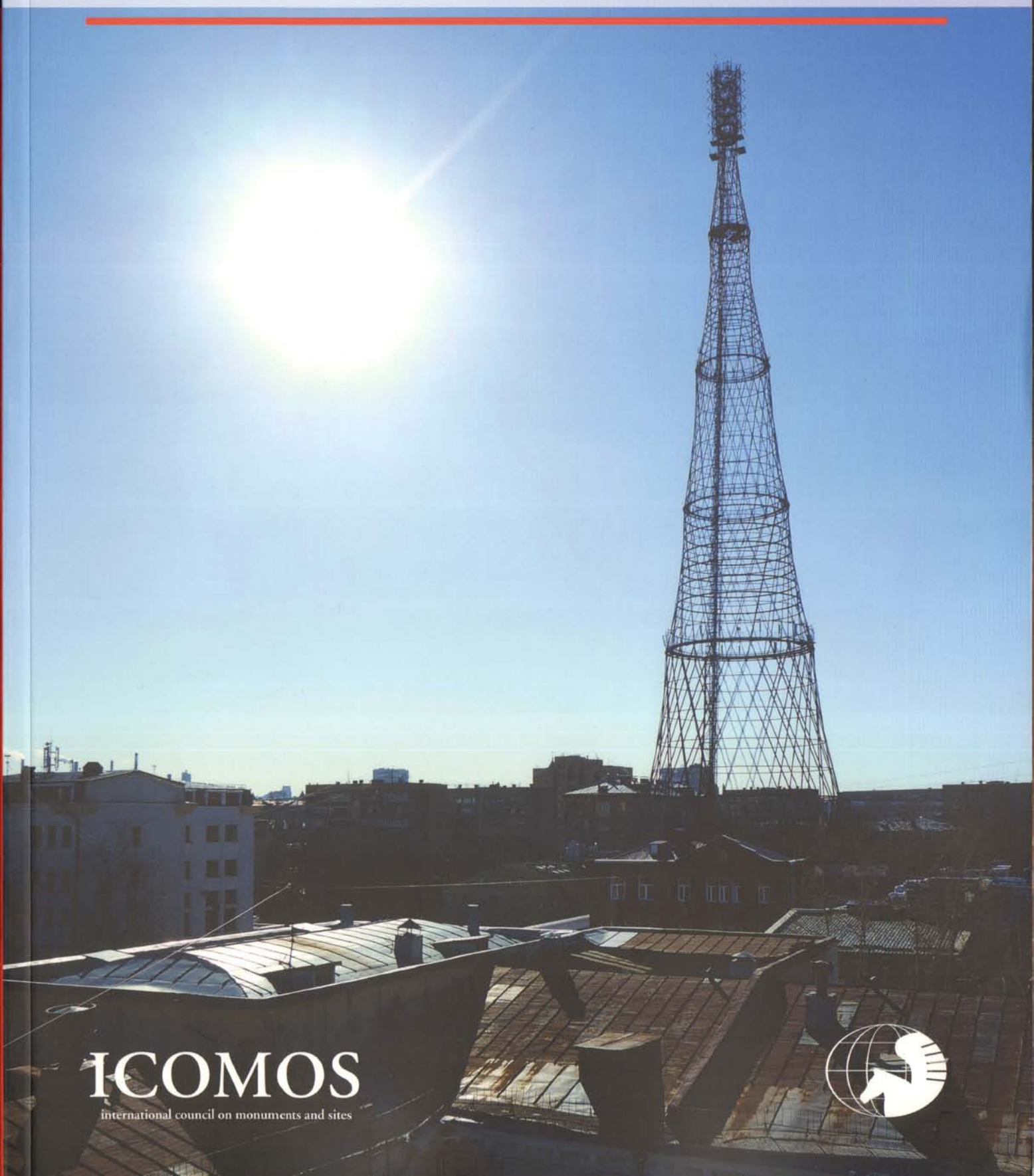
HERITAGE AT RISK

WORLD REPORT 2011-2013

ON MONUMENTS AND SITES IN DANGER



ICOMOS

international council on monuments and sites

BULGARIA

Cultural heritage is endangered more and more by demolition, due not only to the traditional causes of degradation, but also to the recent development of social and economic life, resulting in worsening destructive phenomena. The protection of this heritage at the national level is unsatisfactory because of the large funds necessary. Archaeological sites are among the most vulnerable sites. Many of them are still unexplored. Although they have been declared as monuments by the law, they are subject to interventions of treasure hunters, accompanied by partial or complete destruction of structures and deletion of the valuable archaeological data. Common are cases where archaeological sites are destroyed by digging for construction works. Some investors concerned about a delay of the construction works or an imposition of changes in their intentions deliberately break the law, which expressly provides for the legal protection of such chance finds.

Specific Problems Associated with Heritage at Risk

1. Lack of measures for the protection of uncovered, preserved and restored archeological structures, museum buildings and ensembles of national importance, from the effects of risk factors.
2. Lack of projects in the field of forecasting, risk analysis and monitoring of endangered cultural values, initiated by state and municipal management, museums and other relevant institutions and organisations involved in the national system for the protection of cultural heritage.

A new law on cultural heritage adopted in 2009 introduced for the first time the obligation of the state to organise the protection of cultural heritage from natural disasters and armed conflicts.At the initiative of ICOMOS Bulgaria, the legislature introduced a new category of cultural value, with two subcategories depending on the degree of endangerment:

1. Cultural values at risk – for which there is an imminent threat of damage or destruction by reason of:
   a) location in earthquake zones, areas of large construction projects, being near areas with high risk of flooding or progressive changes of geological, climatic and other environmental factors;
   b) danger of armed conflict and terrorist attacks;
2. Endangered cultural values – for which there is a real danger of damage, vandalism, destruction or serious distortion of their integrity by reason of:
   a) fast disintegration of their original substance, leading to a major change in the structure;
   b) fast deterioration of the environment;
   c) visible loss of their authentic look.

Unfortunately, the legislature did not accept the idea of a special register of "endangered monuments" and "cultural values at risk." Neither did it adopt proposed mechanisms for determining the criteria by which an object of cultural heritage could be registered in one or the other list nor procedures for deciding on the registration.

The Case of Ratiaria

The archaeological site is an example of inadequate government policy and lack of foresight regarding the need to develop the cultural site as a factor for economic prosperity.

The ancient city of Colonia Ulpia Traiana Ratiaria (Ratiaria) is the most important Roman and Byzantine centre in today's northwestern Bulgaria. Its remains are located in the locality of Kaleto on the northern outskirts of the village of Archar, district of Vidin, near the Danube. As an important cultural and historical site Ratiaria could be compared to cities like Serdica (modern Sofia), Philipopolis (Plovdiv), Nicopolis ad Istrum (near the village of Nikyup, district of Veliko Tarnovo), Ulpia Eskus (Municipality of Gulyantsi, district of Pleven, near the mouth of the Iskar River). Recent studies show that the city was founded at the beginning of the first century AD or earlier, as a military camp of the IVth Flavian and VIIth Claudius Legions. In the second and third centuries AD Ratiaria became the centre of a large urban area, prospering economically and culturally. After 272 AD, Ratiaria became the main town of the coastal Dacia Province. The military and administrative governors of the province were situated at Ratiaria. The remains of a monumental building are interpreted as the residence of the governor of the province (Kuzmanov, 2000; Valeva, 2000). Recent findings (monumental architectural decorations) indicate that the public architecture of Ratiaria was more monumental and more abundant than that in Eskus, Nove and Durostorum (Luka, 2011b, p. 271, Obr. 1).

The risks

The critical condition of the archaeological site and challenges to its preservation have come from the lack of any action since the last archaeological excavations in 1991. Ratiaria has become one of the main targets of treasure-hunter intervention and antiquities trafficking over the past two decades instead of being excavated by archaeologists. This problem was announced in international publications such as *Current World Archaeology*, *Past Horizons Magazine*, *Rescue News*. Jewellery, statues and inscriptions from the site have appeared in auctions in Western Europe and the United States.

The main problems related to the protection of the site at the moment are:

The main street (decumanus maximus) of Ratiaria discovered in 2011 at the time of investigation. The excavations carried out in 2012 proved that the town was founded in the early decades of the 1st century A. D. and had an active life until the end of the 5th c. A. D.

A photo taken by Associated Press after the closing of the excavation in 2012. It shows the main street of the town (decumanus maximus) left to the mercy of the looters.

After the archaeologists had left eight men were employed by the Municipality of Dimovo to guard the excavation site. The photo clearly shows that no care is being taken of the Roman street despite the declared intentions for preserving the site.

Inadequate institutional commitment to the critical situation of the site

The archaeological site of Ratiaria was declared a monument of "national significance". The archaeological reserve is the only status of high protection, which provides the legal framework for heritage in Bulgaria. The municipal administration of Dimovo has a folder labeled "Ratiaria Reserve" in which the last document dates back to November 9, 2004. All documents required by the law to initiate the procedure for notification of Ratiaria as reserve were sent to the Ministry of Culture and to the National Institute of Monuments. The absence of documentation between 2004 and 2009 actually illustrates quite vividly a period of complete withdrawal of the responsible institutions (including those of researchers) from the problem or the abandonment of the problem.

Lack of funds for planning and implementing the necessary measures for the conservation of the site

In 2001, an interdepartmental committee decided that any financing activities such as security guards, repair of the fence in the area around the monument, the territorial scope of application of the monument on the local cadastre, trench backfilling and regular excavations have to be made by the municipality of Dimovo. If, however, one takes into account that the area of the site is about 415 acres, this decision puts the municipality of Dimovo in a situation of financial collapse.

Lack of a management plan and of projects for the conservation and restoration of the site

While the responsible institutions transfered files and the name of Ratiaria occurred only in the criminal records, in 2009 a new Heritage Act was passed. The obligations for the institutions have now become even more burdensome to implement, for instance the mandatory preparation of a management plan for immovable cultural property of national significance. In the case of Ratiaria the financing must be supported by the municipality on whose territory the immovable cultural property is situated.

Absence of social and educational initiatives among the local population aimed at increasing awareness of the values of the archaeological site

In 1993 the Republic of Bulgaria ratified the Convention of the Council of Europe for the protection of archaeological heritage. According to the Convention each country should conduct educational activities to raise public awareness about the importance of archaeological heritage for understanding the past and the threats to this heritage.

Public and educational initiatives initiated by local authorities in collaboration with the civil sector are directly linked to investments in conservation of heritage, which certainly is an effective tool for the sustainable development of local communities. With improved coordination between the competent institutions and involvement of private sector investment processes and the implementation of best practices, it is possible to stop the destruction and start a successful model for the preservation of endangered heritage.

Highly prominent criminal and corrupt practices

It is no secret that organised crime in the area of the heritage site is now growing and is expected to continue to do so. Theft is everywhere, but beneficial to its increase are corruption and weak control of authorities – police, customs officers, state and local governments involved in the preservation of heritage. Fac-

tors such as globalisation of economic relations, opportunities for money laundering, increasing poverty in the region and loss of respect for the monuments provide a negative effect on the critical situation.

The specifics of the case of Ratiaria are expressed in the scale of tampering, manifested in illegal excavations and destruction of archaeological layers by heavy digging equipment, convenient and quick access to the border, which facilitates international traffic in cultural property, and minimum police and judicial control over the perpetrators of criminal interventions.

What has been done?

In 2009, the Bulgarian Archaeological Association "Ivan Venedikov" launched a campaign "Help to preserve the biggest archaeological site in North Bulgaria - COLONIA ULPIA TRAIANA RATIARIA". Because of this, and with the assistance of the Inspectorate for Preservation of Heritage to the Ministry of Culture, first steps were taken to protect the site. In 2010, the same Association, with the permission of the Minister of Culture, carried out rescue archaeological excavations in which the following steps were made:

- a detailed survey of the entire territory on which the cultural remains in the Kaleto locality are registered;
- a photo documentation and location of movable and immovable cultural property;
- assessment of the status of the architectural remains from the fortification system and public buildings. studied until 1991;
- backfilling of treasure hunter trenches and leveling of the terrain in the southeastern part of the locality of Kaleto.
- documentation of epigraphic and architectural movable cultural property.
- removal of the terrain and presentation of movable cultural property in a temporary exhibition in the cultural centre of education in the village of Archar.

In 2011 the Bulgarian Archaeological Association "Ivan Venedikov" supported by ICOMOS Bulgaria prepared a nomination for inclusion of Ratiaria in the 2012 list of the 100 most endangered sites of the World Monuments Fund.

What prospects and potentialities are there?

Attracting the attention of the international scientific community will provide the chance of showing Ratiaria's problems and seeking long-term solutions concerning the economic crisis and the decline of spiritual values. To have a successful recovery plan for the archaeological site of Ratiaria a professional monitoring by international NGOs is needed to help focus the public interest and stimulate the private sector.

The Case of Sozopol

Sozopol is a small town on the southern part of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. Distinguished for its beaches and rocky cliffs, its favourable climatic, natural and topographical conditions, today Sozopol is one of the most popular seaside resorts in Bulgaria.

Sozopol, the original part of the tower is preserved in its base only, whereas the rest is new masonry

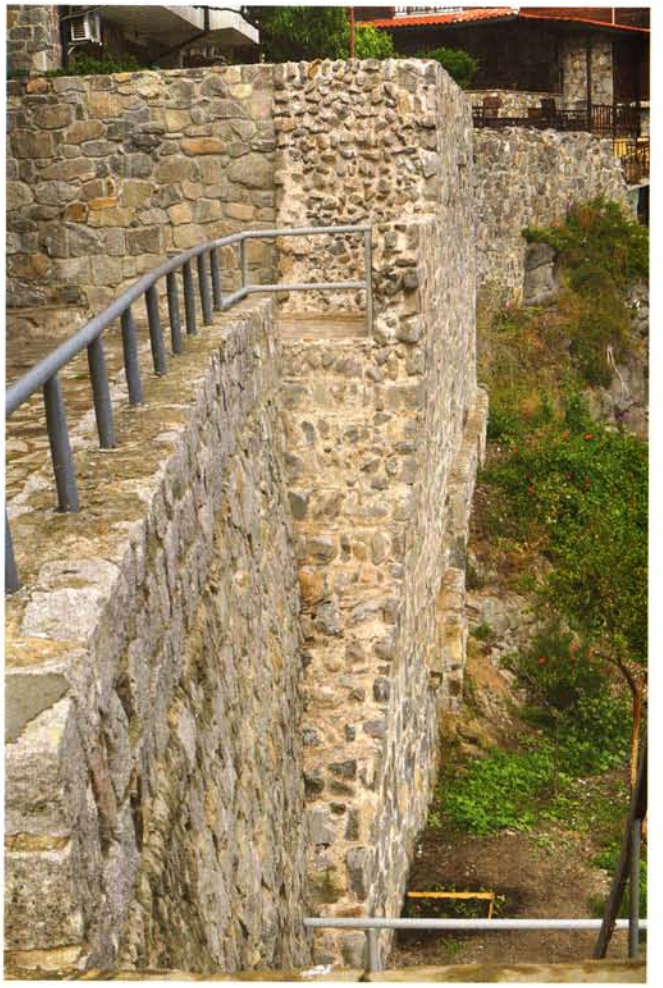
Houses from the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries still preserved illustrate that the town developed through the centuries as a 'natural and man-made environment'.

Sozopol is the direct successor of Apollonia, a colony founded around 610 BC by Greeks from Asia Minor. Both local Thracians and Greek colonists inhabited the peninsula, which only later was fortified by the Byzantines. As hinterland of Constantinople and one of the most important international ports, Sozopol experienced remarkable cultural and economic growth and became a major economic centre of the area. Later the town became a disputed territory in the policy between the Bulgarian Kingdom and the Byzantine Empire, and was alternately annexed by both rivals. The term 'crossroad of civilisations', generally applied to the Balkans, is entirely applicable to Sozopol.

Although Sozopol was given the status of a national preserve, its cultural heritage and its natural heritage have been recently threatened by the building activities of private properties overflowing the modern city and its vicinity, as well as by the campaign to restore archaeological entities affecting all archaeological entities. In fact, this campaign has resulted in the loss of authenticity of the cultural heritage. In recent years, parallel to the archaeological excavations we have seen building activities on a large scale upon the monuments discovered. These activities have exceeded the conservation process declared as 'urgent'. As a result the original structures have been walled up by the new masonry and often it is the archeological stratigraphy that has been damaged. Monuments have been reconstructed on the basis of conjecture, whereas all the analysis and reasons for the additions remain unknown.

The violations observed can be summarized in four main groups:

- The authenticity of the architectural monuments has been replaced by rebuilding these monuments.
- The context of the archeological heritage monuments has been replaced. The stone monuments have been separated from their original environment and embedded into contemporary structures.
- The disproportion between overbuilding certain monuments and overlooking other monuments.



Sozopol, the medieval fortress wall under construction (left) and after completion (right)

Remains of the medieval fortress

The medieval church in the vicinity of Sozopol: another quarry for construction material

– The sea-shore is destroyed through the laying of concrete platforms over it and down below the Fortress wall as well as by the use of stones and sand from the nearby beaches as building materials.

Even though the principles adopted by UNESCO have been violated, Sozopol is regarded by the national institutions in charge as a model of how to convert the cultural heritage into mere tourist attractions. This trend betrays an irreversible shift in understanding the value of monuments.

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ICOMOS Bulgaria

Nessebar, map showing the outline of the World Heritage area and its buffer zone

Nessebar, detail of medieval church

The Coastal Town of Nessebar

The Ancient City of Nessebar, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1983, has in the past years been increasingly disturbed by factors such as uncontrolled urban development affecting the historic fabric of certain buildings as well as the overall appearance and the silhouette of certain parts of the World Heritage site (including the coastal areas); loss of the heritage value of individual historic buildings; unchecked spread of movable tourist facilities in the historic centre; absence of appropriate planning, monitoring, management and conservation mechanisms. This situation, which was also criticised by the non-governmental organization Old Nessebar Association in a report of 2011, was brought to the attention of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee. At the 35th and 37th sessions in 2011 and 2013 the Committee acknowledged the efforts already made "to launch policy and legislative initiatives intended to enhance protection of the World Heritage property, as well as the strong commitment of the State Party to improve measures in place for the conservation of the World Heritage property", and the fact that the municipality "suspended the issuing of building permits in the protected area". However, to further improve the city's protected status the Committee requested the State Party to implement certain recommendations, in particular effective legislative and regulatory measures for the management of the buffer zone and the sea coastline and for the regulation of tourism activities; development and approval of an urban master plan and conservation plan; realisation of priority conservation and maintenance works for the historic buildings and archaeological sites (see also http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/4495 and http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/5085).

John Ziesemer