

BOLIVIA – HERITAGE @ RISK!

Bolivia, a Mediterranean country in the middle of South America, possesses a rich cultural heritage whose conservation is permanently threatened. This heritage, which includes archaeological sites, urban centres, isolated monuments and cultural landscapes, has currently four sites that are inscribed in the World Heritage List. Sadly, this does not put them at lesser risk of being destroyed by different factors. The lack of adequate and up-to-date legislation in regards to cultural heritage is one of the most important causes of risk.

Archaeological Sites

In the case of archaeological sites that are cared for by the State according to the Constitution, the risk is higher because the respective authorities are not sufficient and have too many restrictions when it comes to allowing private professionals to work at sites they are not related to. Therefore, sites are threatened not only by natural phenomena but also mainly by a lack of maintenance and the absence of adequate management plans. This has led sites to be ignored to the extent that they are vulnerable to all kinds of vandalism and even tourism itself. Samaipata, presented as a case study, is an archaeological site registered in the World Heritage List in 1999, which continues to deteriorate and despite the existence of studies about it, there is very little that can be done. There are many other endangered archaeological sites such as this one.

Urban Centres and Isolated Monuments

In this group, which in our country includes the architecture of the Colonial and Republican times (1548 to the present) there are various examples that are at risk. In this case the causes are not only natural or the simple wear and tear of the fabric, but principally social and human factors. The not-well-understood progress and the lack of adequate policies for their conservation are causing much of this heritage to disappear. In many cases there is development and conservation for these historical areas, however there are no funds allocated for their implementation. The cultural heritage is not a particular priority among Government policies. Once more, the lack of an adequate conservation policy and up to date legislation stops such disasters from being prevented. Because of the political changes and the new reforms in the government, together with the new incursion of religious sects, communities that had regional monuments under their care have allowed that treasure to deteriorate as well as the religious temples that contain considerable artistic heritage that is continuously being stolen from such temples.

Cultural Landscapes

The case for cultural landscapes is no different than other heritage. The economic situation has forced communities, which had transformed natural landscapes into cultural landscapes, to

leave those regions and therefore this decreases the ongoing care for these landscapes. The case of Lake Titicaca, which is shared with Perú, is one of the most important. The absence of bi-lateral agreements and the often mentioned lack of adequate legislation risks the disappearance of important remains, both cultural and ethnological heritage, as well as the loss of traditions and ancestral customs typical of the area.

Solutions and Proposals

Up until today the work of ICOMOS Bolivia has been centred on helping the national cultural authorities in the development of new cultural heritage legislation which includes adequate policies regarding the conservation of the sites, monuments, urban centres and cultural landscapes, as well as the prevention of any risks that may affect them.

Likewise, ICOMOS Bolivia has participated in the creation of bi-lateral agreements with different countries, those bordering Bolivia, as well as those further away, as in the case of the United States of America, in order to stop the illicit traffic of cultural heritage objects that are taken outside the country.

Two examples of endangered heritage in our country follow. One is an archaeological example and the other one, whose historical value is of great importance, belongs to the Republican era.

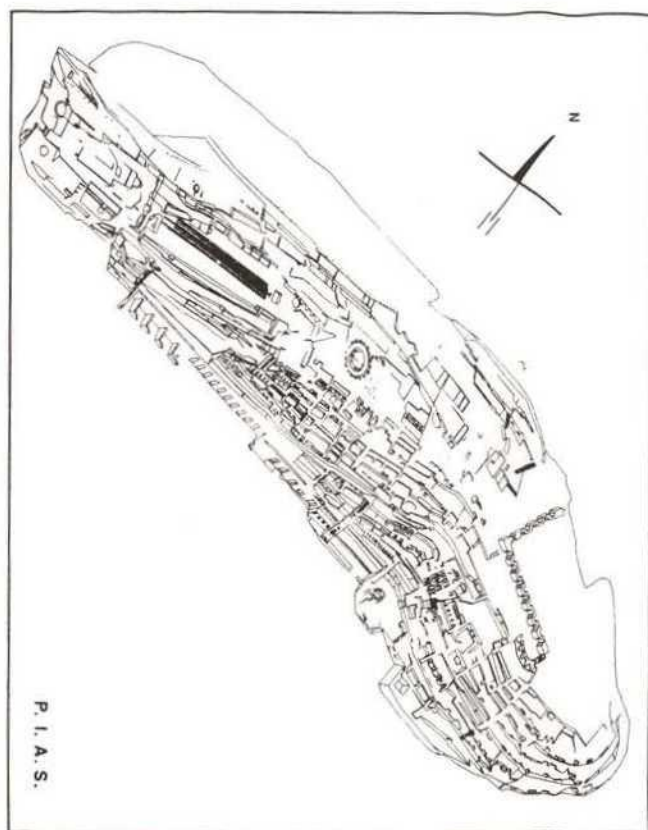
Case Study 1 – The sculptured rock at Samaipata, Dept. of Santa Cruz

Location:

The village of Samaipata lies 75 miles (120 km) to the west of the city of Santa Cruz, on the road to Cochabamba. The archaeological site, popularly known as “El Fuerte”, is situated about

The rock at Samaipata is posing serious conservation problems. There are numerous cracks, pieces are flaking off, and lichens are growing on the surface whose roots contribute to the deterioration of the stone and its carvings.





Plan of the sculptured rock at Samaipata, Dept. of Santa Cruz



View of the sculptured rock at Samaipata, Dept. of Santa Cruz

3 miles (5 km) from the village, at an altitude of about 2000 m (6500 feet).

Characteristics of the heritage place:

An immense ridge of sandstone (longitude 240 m or 780 feet, width 50 m or 163 feet) bears carvings on all sides, in the form of terraces, niches, steps or seats. On its surface there are deep-cut basins, channels, and reliefs. This monument is surrounded by numerous ruins, which partly have been excavated, revealing pre-Inca, Inca and Colonial settlements. The area forms an archaeological park, which has been fenced in by the National Archaeological Institute and employs permanent guardians.

Cultural importance of the heritage place:

The ruins "El Fuerte" are of great importance, not only for the archaeology of East Bolivia, but also for the history of humanity. In 1998, this site was inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Tourism and tourist facilities:

Massive tourism comes to the ruins (in 1998 more than 20,000 visitors). A trail leads round the sculptured rock and to some ruins. A lookout on a hill to the west allows a view of the scenery and the site.

Current threats:

Numerous acts of vandalism occurred prior to and even after the creation of the Archaeological Park. The nature of the fragile sandstone poses a serious problem to the conservation of this site. The Centre of Archaeological and Anthropological Investigations at Samaipata is responsible for the maintenance and administration of the Park and its site, but hampered in its task by insufficient funding.

Possible conservation program:

At present, a conservation program is being considered. Preliminary tentative treatment of the fragile sandstone has begun, as advised by Franz Moll (Ars Restaurato, Germany). A critical assessment of this treatment has been published in Boletín 14 (2000) by the Bolivian Rock Art Research Society SIARB, including an article by Elena Charola (Scientific Consultant in Conservation, USA) and Fernando M. A. Henriques (Univ. Nova de Lisboa, Portugal).

Case Study 2 – The Palace of La Florida, Dept. of Chuquisaca

Location:

The little Palace of La Florida is located outside of the city of Sucre, the official capital of Bolivia. The city has been included in the World Heritage List since 1991. Originally, the owner of this landmark in the beginning was the Argandona family, an aristocratic family in Sucre where the wife of President Aniceto Arce came from. It was our President who started the main building and had the headquarters of his government and his home.

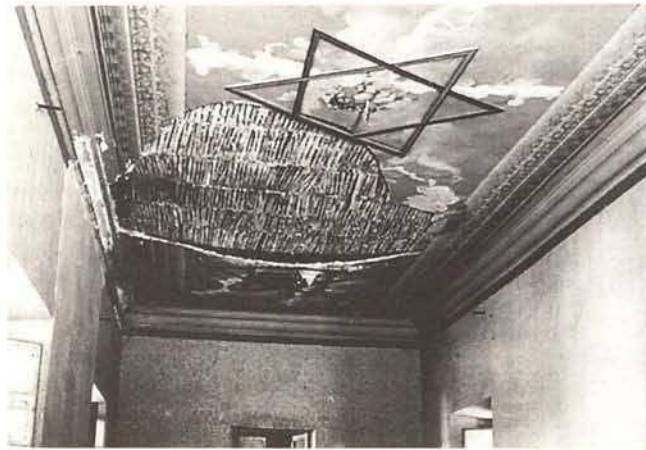
Characteristics of the monument:

The building has two blocks around a rectangular court with two lateral wings. These wings are asymmetric in length. The special location of the building in front of a rock mountain makes that the building had only one façade. There is a gallery surrounding the building with arches and circular columns supporting a terrace. The main rooms of the building are in French decoration. There are mural paintings on the ceilings and also it is one of the few buildings that until now is 80% covered in wallpaper. This wallpaper and other materials were bought in



La Florida Palace, Sucre

Damaged ceiling inside La Florida Palace



Europe and until today it is one of the best exponents of the architecture of the end of the 19th century.

Importance of the monument:

As already said, this was the headquarters of the government in recent years when all the government moved to the city of Sucre. Because of its location it is almost abandoned.

Current threats:

The present state of conservation is critical. The building was in charge of the Arce Argandona family until 1953 when the Reforma Agraria was established and the agrarian communities got it. Later it belonged to the veterans of the Chaco War, a war we lost against Paraguay in the 1930s. It was in 1996 when the local government bought the building to conserve it, but it has had little maintenance since 1997.

Possible conservation program:

The local authorities asked the Spanish Government and the Corporacion Andina de Fomento (CAF), a regional multilateral bank, for international help to conserve the monument. Unfortunately the Spanish Co-operation decided to give money for the conservation of buildings that belong to the Colonial Era (16th to 18th centuries). This decision did not help the negotiations with CAF and at the moment we are waiting for the new authorities in Sucre to do something to conserve it.

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